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# EIGHT SERMONS,

PREACHED IN ST. PANCRAS CHURCH,

WITH

AN APPENDIX.

---

BY THE

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MINISTER OF ST. PANCRAS PAROCHIAL CHAPEL.

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TO THE  
REV. JAMES MOORE, LL.D.

VICAR OF ST. PANCRAS,

*These Sermons,*

PREACHED IN THE CHURCH WHICH WAS THE CENTRE,

DURING MANY YEARS,

OF HIS EXTENSIVE AND EFFICIENT MINISTRATIONS,

.

BUT FROM THE ACTIVE DUTIES OF WHICH,

HE IS NOW, BY SEVERE AFFLICTION, UNHAPPILY REMOVED,

ARE DEDICATED,

WITH FEELINGS OF SINCERE RESPECT,

BY HIS OBLIGED FRIEND AND SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.



## PREFACE.

---

THE following Sermons are selected from those which were preached by the Author, in the discharge of his public duty as Curate of St. Pancras. It was after much hesitation that he decided on publishing them, as he was conscious that, unless for special reasons, a preacher ought not to ask for any attention to his discourses, except that which should be given during the time of their delivery. The Author, however, was persuaded to believe that such special reasons might, in his case, be assigned; and chief amongst these reasons, he may mention the desire of many of his friends to possess, in such a volume as the present, a memorial of services which have just concluded. He does not claim much, if indeed he may claim any, merit for his Sermons, on the ground of originality in

the ideas and the illustrations they contain ; but at least he will venture to say, that they exhibit an honest *attempt* to employ a more efficient style of religious teaching than is now generally adopted in the Pulpit.

*October, 1845.*

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# SERMON I.

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## HEARTFELT FAITH.

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ROMANS x. 10.

“For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.”

THE word righteousness, as employed by the Apostle in this verse, has been understood in two different senses. In one of these, it is held to represent that state of holiness into which the Christian will be certainly conducted by a genuine and an earnest faith. And, if this be the true sense of the word, as here employed, our text is equivalent to an assertion of the power of heartfelt faith to produce the piety and virtue which is acceptable to God. The Apostle, then, must be held to affirm, that whenever our creed has an influence over our affections, we shall, of necessity, be distinguished by sanctity of life. In the other of the two senses which it has here received, the word righteousness is supposed to indicate that character which God, for the sake of Christ, is pleased to attribute to the



act of belief considered in itself, and without reference to the fruits it may produce. And, if this be the correct explanation of the word, our text must be regarded as describing the nature of that faith which will procure our justification in the sight of God, and by means of which, therefore, our salvation will be secured.

Now it is of no practical consequence whether we receive the one or the other of these interpretations. The text either asserts the power of heartfelt faith to conduct the believer into holiness of life, or it specifies the description of faith which alone can be efficient as an instrument of our salvation; and whichever view of the Apostle's language our judgment may incline us to select, is, as we have said, a matter of no practical importance. The reason of this is evident. The doctrines respectively contained in these two views mutually imply and introduce each other. If, on the one hand, we believe the Apostle to assert that heartfelt faith alone is efficacious in producing that holiness which is approved by God, this implies the indispensableness of such belief for the attainment of our salvation; for "without holiness no man can see the Lord." Or if, on the other hand, we receive the text as a description of that faith which alone can be efficacious in the work of our redemption, this equally implies the necessary tendency of heartfelt belief to produce sanctity of life; for the faith which is followed by salvation is uniformly represented in

Scripture as fruitful in those virtues which are well-pleasing in the Divine sight.

We have made these remarks for the sake of securing the full force and value of those practical inferences which we hope, by the Divine blessing, to derive from the Apostle's words. These inferences will be seen to hold good whichever interpretation of the text we may prefer. The two views respectively contained in these interpretations must, at all events, be taken together; and when combined, they become equivalent to the assertion, that the faith which is seated in the heart, and has its fruits in a holy life, is essential to the salvation of the soul. And this assertion we shall endeavour to illustrate and establish by considering such faith in opposition, 1st, to that which exists merely as an inference of the reason; and 2ndly, to that which exerts all its influence over the imagination, and is in consequence destitute of any practical effect.

There may be a faith in the facts and doctrines of Christianity which shall exist merely as an inference of the reason. Our belief in the truth of the Gospel narrative may be precisely identical, in its nature and foundation, with our belief in the truth of any detail of history or of any abstraction of science. The intellectual powers, which have examined the secular documents of ancient times, and ascertained the authority of their disclosures, may examine, in like manner, the historical evi-

dence of our sacred records, and thus acquire a full conviction of the truth of the narrative they contain. There may be an inquiry into the accuracy of the Gospel history, precisely similar to that which may be instituted into the accuracy of any other history belonging to a distant time and place. And, as the result of such inquiry, there may be a clear and invincible persuasion that our Lord actually lived upon earth,—that He performed the miracles, and endured the sufferings, which the Evangelists describe,—that He died and rose again,—and that previously to his ascension into heaven, He commanded his Apostles to preach his Gospel to every creature. All these facts may be received without hesitation, and regarded with unwavering confidence, because the historical evidence on which they rest has been proved to be without defect. And, in like manner, as the reason may be employed in considering the abstract truths of science, and the successive steps of the investigations by which they have been reached, so also may it ponder the doctrines of religion, and ascertain their harmony with the remainder of the moral system in the midst of which we live and move. The intellect may dwell on the high truths of revealed theology, and perceive their analogy with those which nature teaches; their adaptation to the wants and aspirations of men; their sublime elevation above those to which unaided reason could attain; and, as the result of

.

such reflection, may unhesitatingly conclude that the Christian theology really had the origin to which it asserts a claim. In all this procedure, however, no other faculty than reason need have been employed, or employed in any other manner than when it investigated the truths of geometry, or traced a path amidst the stars. That faith in the facts and doctrines of Christianity, which in these modes has been obtained, may continue to exist merely as a conclusion of the judgment, as a result of the working of the intellectual powers. The conviction thus obtained, may remain in the mind, if we may so speak, in the very state in which reason left it, and so take its place amidst the ordinary knowledge and cogitations of the soul. It may receive no special attention above any other tenet of the judgment; but, after it has been once lodged in the recesses of the spirit, it may only be regarded like other and ordinary notions, when the requirements of time and place shall call it forth. In a word, this conviction of the intellect may continue as it was first conceived, and assume no higher character. It may have formed no alliance with the emotions, nor exerted any influence upon the will.

. But “with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.” The faith which accompanies salvation must dwell with the affections, and govern the will. It must be implanted in the heart, and have its fruits in a holy life. The intellectual conviction that Christianity is true, must be animated and

rendered efficacious by the affections which Christianity is fitted to engender. It must lead the mind to dwell on the details and the doctrines of the Gospel, till the emotions they naturally arouse are in full and efficient exercise. It must exert authority and power upon the will, till every action is conformed to the model which Christ established. There must first, indeed, be an intellectual conviction. The judgment must first admit the truth of the Christian history, and the Christian creed; but this conviction and this admission must not exist alone; for they have in themselves no more worth and no more efficacy, in regard to the salvation of the soul, than any other tenet or decision in which the intellect is alone concerned. Our faith must form an alliance with our affections, and so be quickened into an active life. It must furnish motives of action, and so be converted into a vital and efficient power. The affections and the habits of the believer must bear testimony to its influence. He must love the Lord, and the precepts of the Lord, with his heart and soul and strength; and he must live not unto himself, but unto Him who died for him and rose again. He admits that "Christ was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary," and that "He was made man;" yes, but this admission must be followed by affectionate gratitude to Him who for our sakes left heaven, and came to visit us in such great humility. He believes that Christ passed a

holy life on earth in perfect favour with God and man, but his belief is vain unless he is thereby led to love that sacred purity, to seek a participation in that holiness. He avows his conviction that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, and that He rose again; but how idle is this avowal, how worthless is this creed, if he be not led thereby into deep remorse for the sin which crucified his Lord; if he resolve not, that "like as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father," even so he also will walk in "newness of life!" Yes, brethren, it is not enough to admit the truth of our Lord's descent on earth, and the reality of those scenes of suffering and shame through which He passed on our behalf; we must do more than this, we must pray with deep earnestness that the Holy Spirit would so impress our hearts by the holiness and the love which our Lord thus evinced, that we may indeed become his disciples,—his disciples in feeling as well as in outward act, in spirit as well as in profession. And it is not enough to give our credence, or even our veneration, to the doctrines of our religion, to acknowledge their adaptation to our wants and aspirations, their sublime elevation above the thoughts and conjectures of the wisest men; we must do more than this, we must pray and strive that these truths may sanctify our hearts, that they may become "a lamp unto our feet, and a light unto our path," that we may be "born again, not of cor-

ruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever."

We now proceed, in the second place, to contrast the heartfelt faith of which the Apostle speaks, with that which exerts all its influence over the imagination, and is destitute, in consequence, of any practical effect.

There is no religious error more common or more pernicious, (we speak guardedly in saying this,) than that which consists in transferring the influence of Christian faith from the heart to the imagination. The scenes and the doctrines which Christianity unfolds, are converted, by this error, into the source of a merely intellectual excitement. Faith is thus made to minister unto the fancy, instead of governing the feelings; it becomes the servant of the imagination, instead of the sovereign of the heart. And it is easy to explain how this comes to pass. The Christian revelation, in its solemn and sublime disclosures, in its pathetic and gorgeous scenes, presents two subjects which the soul may contemplate. There is, on the one hand, the awfulness and sublimity, the pathos and the splendour, considered as such, in all their fitness to excite the fancy. On the other hand, there are the practical truths which are thus accompanied, claiming an affinity with the affections, and an influence upon the will. And the error, the flagrant and the fatal error, we are considering, arises from attention to the first subject, in utter exclusion and oblivion of the second.

The intellect regards the vehicle and mere accompaniments of the truths which are revealed, but the truths themselves it contemns or overlooks. The mind is elevated by the sublimity, or awed by the grandeur, or touched by the pathos, of the sacred disclosures; but, while thus affected, it fails to perceive and to recognize the practical aspect which these disclosures bear, the vital relations which they sustain unto itself. And thus faith may produce all manner of commotion in the intellect, and not one true movement of the heart to God. It may excite awe without devotion, and fear without humility, and even tears without remorse.

This error has a full illustration in the workings of the mind on other subjects. Nothing is more possible, and we may add more common, than to peruse pages of essays or of poetry designed to enforce or adorn some great moral truth,—to peruse these pages, and to be conscious of nothing else but the eloquence and the conceptions with which they are enriched,—to lay them down, not only without a deep impression, but in utter forgetfulness of the truths in whose service they were written. The eloquence and the poetry were observed and are remembered, the moral was perhaps altogether overlooked, and is certainly forgotten. In like manner, the mind may dwell on the delineation of some pathetic and touching scene, on words which utter forth the sorrows and the woes of living



suffering, and utter them that the sorrows may find sympathy, and that the woes may be assuaged; and yet, while there is an intellectual, we might say a luxurious sense of the pathos and the sentiment, there is no movement of the heart towards the object thus distressed; the hands and the feet are not stirred into active exertion on behalf of the afflicted, the tears of suffering are not wiped away, the bed of sickness or of death remains uncheered. Nay, it may be even worse than this; for as it has been well said, "no cloak of selfishness is in fact more impenetrable than that which usually envelops a pampered imagination. The reality of woe is the very circumstance which paralyses sympathy, and the eye that can pour forth its flood of commiseration for the sorrows of the romance or the drama, grudges a tear for the substantial wretchedness of the unhappy<sup>1</sup>."

Now the evil and deceptive movement of the mind in such cases, illustrates, with much force and accuracy, the error we are considering. Just as there may be a delight in the eloquence of the moralist, or in the conceptions of the poet, without any attention to the truths which they inculcate; in the pathos and the sentiments of those who advocate the cause of the afflicted, without any active and efficient sympathy for the subjects of their pleadings; just so may there be a full appre-

<sup>1</sup> Natural History of Enthusiasm, ch. i.

ciation of the force and grandeur of the Scripture statements, of the eloquence and the imagery by which they are distinguished, of the exquisite pathos with which they delineate scenes the most touching earth ever witnessed : there may be a full appreciation of all this, and no regard whatever, or at least no practical regard, to the vital, abiding, personal truths, whose announcement is thus accompanied or enforced. The mind is engaged with the mere vehicle of the truth, not with the truth itself; with the instruments by which the revelation is conveyed, and not with the principles which the revelation was intended to disclose. The faith thus evinced may cause great commotion in the intellect, and may even excite the feelings; but it produces no deep, no heartfelt, no practical result. It may cause amazement, and awe, and terror; nay, even sympathy and pity; but they are the brief excitements of the imagination, they are the transports of an hour; there is no penitence, no gratitude, no love. The poetry of Milton and the music of Handel can produce the same effects. The "Paradise Lost" and the "Messiah" may equally kindle the fancy and cause a thrilling excitement of the feelings, while the heart shall still remain in its natural state of alienation from God, the spirit still abide in its first hostility to Him.

And therefore it is that St. Paul affirms, "with the heart man believeth unto righteousness." There must be a personal, a practical interest in all the

great truths which faith opens to the view. It may be well to feel the influence of these truths upon the intellect, but it is only well so far as this influence may deepen their effects upon the heart. It may be well that they should excite the imagination, but it is only well so far as this excitement may be made to minister to a practical result. The affections and the life must bear testimony to their influence. The affections must be converted unto God. The life, in its principles and in its objects, must be conformed to Him. We may dwell upon his attributes; our intellects may be wrapt in amazement and in awe, as we think of the holiness which can abide no stain—of the omnipotence which, in a moment, could create or consume a world; but this contemplation is worse than useless unless we are thereby led to consider our own defilement, in comparison with his holiness—unless we remember that against us, if still abiding in impenitence, his omnipotence will be arrayed. We may peruse with emotion, yea, even with tears, the narrative of our Lord's life and sufferings and death; but, unless we remember that for us men and for our salvation He came down from heaven, that He was wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities, unless we remember this, so that sorrow for sin be among our emotions, and penitence be the fountain of our tears, our emotions will be worthless, and our tears of no avail. We may look onward to the last great day, and be conscious of the deepest

awe as we contemplate the sublime and stupendous imagery by which the transactions of the great assize are represented to our minds ; yes, but individually and personally each one of us will be there ; and unless we recognize this truth, vain, ah, how vain ! are all our imaginations of the terrors and the grandeur of that scene. When, in fact, we take our place amongst the myriads who will be cited to the bar of God, it is not the magnificence of the assemblage, though spectators from the palaces of heaven will crowd to the wondrous convocation, and though the universe may blaze with the splendour which accompanies the scene, yet it is not this magnificence which will impress and absorb our spirits ; no, whatever may be the case now, our personal interest will then overwhelm every other feeling, our sin and our sentence will wholly occupy our souls. Conscience will overpower the imagination ; the moral faculties will reign with a supreme and an undivided sway. Our present contemplations, therefore, of that great day will be worse than useless, if they exist merely as an exercise of the imagination, if they involve no appeal to the conscience, no consideration of the moral position we shall then individually occupy, of the sentence we shall then individually receive. And neither will it be of any avail to listen now with attention and interest to the utterance of the preacher's voice, as he earnestly discourses on righteousness, and temperance, and judgment to

come, unless we make a personal application to ourselves of the truths which he proclaims. There may be a deep interest in his message when it rolls in sentences of eloquence and pathos from his lips, and no interest at all when he declares it without excellency of speech or knowledge. And what does this indicate but the presence of the very error against which we have been contending? There is a love for the excitement which the mere oratory itself can furnish, for the delicious slumber into which the spirit may be lulled, as though by the song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and no love at all for the truths, so far as they are personal and practical, which he proclaims. Yes, we may listen with attention to the preacher's message; we may, if questioned, admit our belief in the reality and importance of all he has affirmed, and yet our attention and belief may exert all their influence as a mere stimulus to the intellect, and leave the heart wholly unaffected and unchanged. Like Herod, we may hear the Baptist gladly, or like Felix, we may tremble before the eloquence of Paul, and equally like Herod and Felix, we may practise open sin.

Brethren, we are not using words of vain declamation, but of truth and soberness, when we say that no error is more common or more fatal than the one we are endeavouring to describe. Men listen Sunday after Sunday to exhortations from God's ministers, that they would behold the Lamb

of God which taketh away their sins; and in this character they do not, and they will not look upon their Lord. They are besought to live no longer to themselves, but unto Him who died for them and rose again; and yet they continue with the old man still strong within them, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind. But why and how is this? They listen with attention to these exhortations, and believe, too, in their authority and importance. Yes, but they do not dwell upon them, they give to them no continued and serious thought, they do not pray over them, they take them not into their hearts. And it is very sad and fearful to reflect how many are, in consequence, fatally deceived; for, let them be assured, earnest and frequent attention of this superficial kind, plausible and promising as it may appear, will effect nothing on their behalf but to place them among the first who shall be hereafter last, to strengthen them in a delusion which our Lord himself represents as continuing in force until his utterance of those awful words, "I tell you I know you not whence ye are."

And now, in conclusion, let me again remind you, it is not by faith which exists merely as an inference of the reason, as it is not by faith which exerts all its influence over the imagination without any practical result, it is not by faith of either of these kinds that you can hereafter be associated with the redeemed who are now in heaven. They have been saved by faith, but then it was faith

which had its seat in the heart, and its fruits in holiness and love. The habits and emotions which faith called into exercise here, have now their full development in the society and engagements of the upper world. And how are these described? "I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb." "These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them<sup>2</sup>." Yes, they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb; they have individually, with a heartfelt faith, trusted in the atonement of Christ for the pardon of their sins. This faith was allied with their affections, it was fruitful of gratitude and love, and it is to these emotions they give utterance in their songs of praise. And they serve Him day and night in his temple: without cessation; for without weariness they perform his work. These are their habits and emotions in heaven, these were

<sup>2</sup> Revelation, vii. 9, 10. 14, 15.

their habits and emotions on earth. Is it our desire to join that holy throng? Is it our aspiration, and our aim, to stand as they do before the throne of God? Then, as they did, "with the heart let us believe unto righteousness." Let us pray that our faith may influence our affections and govern our will, may have its fruits in a wise and holy life; then our death will be peaceful, nay, triumphant, for we shall feel that it is a passage into eternal bliss, the opening of the door which will admit us into heaven.



## SERMON II.

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### THE HEAVENLY WORLD.

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REVELATION vii. 15.

“Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple.”

THE Book of Revelation is the chief source from which we derive our conceptions of the heavenly state. It unfolds with more of detail and vividness than any other book of Scripture, the principal characteristics of that abode, into which the faithful in Christ Jesus are to enter after the transactions of the judgment-day. And this it does by means of the most impressive imagery which can be furnished by the splendour and dignities of earth. The materials of priestly, and regal, and even military pomp, appear in the descriptions which St. John has given of the celestial world; and are so combined, as to present a picture, which is, perhaps, as magnificent and sublime, as the mind, while still embodied, can safely contemplate. This grandeur of description, let it be observed, may fairly be

regarded as a separate and satisfactory proof of the Divine inspiration of the Apostle, who, following the natural bent of his intellect, would have certainly rather dwelt on less exalted and exciting themes <sup>1</sup>.

It must, however, be carefully remembered, that although we should regard St. John as affirming, that there is material splendour in heaven, we are chiefly concerned with the moral and spiritual character of his delineations. They are not spread before us to regale the imagination, but to animate and impress the heart. They are intended not merely to delight the spirit, but to stimulate and strengthen it, in the performance of duty, and in the pursuit after holiness. We are not to gaze in idle rapture on these visions, but rather to be studious that we may derive from them additional motives to piety, that we may bring our souls into harmony with the moral character they display. Indeed, it is, to say the least, highly probable, that the Apostle's representations of heaven are most accurately interpreted, in every case, by giving to them only a spiritual meaning. Among other reasons for such interpretation, there is one suggested by the passage before us, which certainly possesses much force. In the twenty-first chapter of this book, which, according to the best commentators, is occupied with a description of the heavenly and

<sup>1</sup> Note A in Appendix.

not of what is called the millennial state, St. John affirms, that in his vision of the New Jerusalem, the city of redeemed saints, he saw no temple and no night there. In the verse before us, which also describes this heavenly city, we read both of a temple and of day and night. Hence, if the former passage relate to the heavenly and not to the millennial state, it is evident, that, in these particulars at least, we cannot give a literal construction to the Apostle's words. But, if the principle of spiritual interpretation be admitted in any one instance, it is difficult to see why it should not be extended to all others of the same kind. Be this, however, as it may, of one thing we are quite sure, that, to use the Apostle's language, in "reading and hearing the words of this prophecy," we are chiefly blessed by "keeping those things which are written therein;" by regarding the practical instruction it contains, the personal rules of conduct it so emphatically suggests. And perusing these revelations with this view, we shall certainly derive instruction in righteousness; but if with any other, we may expect to be punished for our wrongness of spirit, by being led thereby into much excitement of feeling, and much extravagance of thought. It was said by a wise and good man—"this is a very "mortifying book to a mind greedy of knowledge "and acquirement, but one of the most satisfactory "to a heart solicitous about rules and precepts<sup>2</sup>."

<sup>2</sup> Saurin.

We desire, then, in our meditations on the verse before us, to keep this maxim in view, and to present such truths for your reflection as will have a distinctly practical bearing. And if this should not at first appear, it is hoped that it will be made sufficiently evident before the conclusion of our discourse. We propose, then, to consider the words, "They serve him day and night in his temple," first, as furnishing information respecting the condition of the redeemed in heaven; and, secondly, as opposed to two erroneous notions, which, by the believing and unbelieving respectively, are commonly entertained with regard to that condition.

Although there is, in general, throughout Scripture, considerable reserve, with respect to the properties of the immortal nature and the circumstances of the future world, there are two explicit statements with respect to both these subjects, which, in various forms, it frequently repeats. The first is, that the nature which redeemed beings will assume in their eternal home, will be, in all respects, more excellent than that in which they now exist. There is to be an expansion of every faculty, an enhancement of every feeling, an increase of every power. The "natural" will become a "spiritual" body—the "corruptible" will put on "incorruption." The saint is to be made "equal to the angels;" he is, therefore, to be endowed with angelic wisdom and angelic might. And we are also told, that, most

especially, will additional clearness be given to his moral and spiritual perceptions, additional intensity to his moral and spiritual emotions. The power of his conscience will be augmented, and will be habitually supreme. He will behold all things in the light of God's law, and judge all things according to His righteous judgment. For, when Christ who is their life shall appear, we are told that redeemed beings will be made like Him; and this assimilation, we cannot doubt, will be chiefly wrought out, by giving to the moral and spiritual faculties of their nature, supreme rank and power. They are, hereafter, to know even as they are known; but then they are chiefly known by their moral habits and spiritual affections, and their own future knowledge, therefore, will principally regard the moral and spiritual aspect of whatever subject it may comprise. This information respecting the future habits of the redeemed, Scripture most explicitly sets forth. Their mortal will assume the faculties and powers of immortal being; they will be endowed with celestial energy and wisdom, and so, take their place, by right of equality, amidst the angelic ranks. And their moral and spiritual perceptions will be distinct and vivid; the good or evil, the pious or impious aspect of every subject presented to the mind, will be their chief consideration and concern, and the emotions of their moral nature will be in serious and intense development.

Now we wish you to observe, that, apart from

any direct information on the subject, we might judge it to be quite inconceivable, that the condition of the saint should be thus exalted, the moral and spiritual principles of his nature thus improved, without there being also, on his part, an increase of activity, and of the signs of devout emotion. If the energies of his nature are to be thus increased, so also, one would naturally think, will be his employments. If his powers of action and of thought are to be thus exalted, so also will be the achievements and researches in which he will be engaged. Is he to be endowed with the sagacity and the strength of angels? then, surely, he will be engaged in those duties which the angelic hosts continually perform. Or, can we conceive, that with these improved faculties and powers, he will spend his eternity in an indolent repose, and abide in sloth, amidst the armies which are ever swift to do the will of God? But further. His moral and spiritual faculties will be invigorated: then, surely, he will seek higher scenes and subjects for their exercise. If he was holy and devout on earth, still more will he be so in heaven. If his perceptions of the justice, and sanctity, and love of God, have vividness and influence here, surely they will have much more in that higher world, and, therefore, with deeper earnestness and humility, will he there adore the Lord. If, even now, he feels, that "blessed is the man whom the Lord chooseth, and causeth to approach to him, that he may dwell in his courts,"

then, surely, when his adoration and love are made like that of angels, he will desire to abide for ever in the temple of God, and to continually offer up the litanies and anthems of heavenly worship.

And now observe, how, with these necessary conjectures, our text most accurately corresponds. Is there occupation for the saints in heaven? Yes, truly, for they “serve God day and night.” Without weariness, for without cessation, they perform his will. But the service which they render, is it sanctified by devout and pious thoughts? Do they adore, as well as obey the Lord? Yes, truly; for they “serve him in his temple.” The scene of obedience is the scene of worship. There is adoration in all their service. There is prayer in every occupation. Heaven is a state, not only of active, but of devout existence. This is the information we must regard our text as furnishing, respecting that future abode of bliss; and it is just what other portions of Scripture, relating to that abode, do, when fairly interpreted, lead us to expect.

Our text does not, (as it further appears, from reasons to which we have already alluded,) affirm that every act of redeemed saints, is, strictly and solely, an act of worship; or, that they are confined to any particular locality or edifice, which may be called a temple. The passage, when rightly interpreted, as well as the general analogy of Scripture, rather leads us to conclude, that, like the angels who excel in strength, and to whom, it is affirmed,

they will be equal, they continually perform the commandments of God, hearkening to the voice of his Word; that they are incessantly engaged in action and enterprise which He enjoins; but, that all this is performed in the spirit of worshippers, in devout and acknowledged dependence upon Him who is still their refuge and strength, their rock and high tower, their confidence and defence. They worship while they serve Him; they adore while they obey. We do not gather from the passage, that eternity is spent in continually offering up the praises and the prayers of earth—that redeemed saints continually appear as choristers or suppliants in heaven, but rather, that they are active servants of the Lord, swift and powerful to do his will, and always doing it with such entire reference to Him, that they may as truly be said to serve Him in his temple, as if they continually moved through the aisles of a sanctuary which He had built, and offered up a liturgy which He inspired and enjoined. We read in another passage, that they are “kings and priests unto God;” not kings alone, or priests alone; but, “kings *and* priests unto God;” performing duties which can only be made intelligible to us by means of the authority and influence of an earthly king, and performing them in such a spirit of devotion as would befit the ministers of an earthly house of prayer. And no words, surely, can represent more accurately, or



more forcibly than those of our text, such a condition and such pursuits.

There are, then, occupations; there is activity in heaven. The saints, set free from the corruption and dishonour of the grave, and clothed in the spiritual body of their immortal nature, will be continually summoned, as the angels now are, to high achievements, it may be of intellect, it may be of active piety and love. They may be required to witness or explore new developments of Almighty power, or they may be employed as its instruments in new scenes of being. They may be ministering spirits to future heirs of salvation, heralds of peace and good will to some rebellious and repenting world. Yes; but though they should traverse the universe on such high commissions, they will feel that they are ever in the temple of the Lord; theirs will be the emotions, if not the utterance of constant prayer and praise; always cherishing the spirit, if not lifting up the voice of adoration, as if they regarded creation as the vast cathedral of heavenly worship, and themselves in continual adoration at its shrine. Does our intellect fail to grasp this thought? or, is there a suspicion that such representations are mere dreams of an excited fancy, the subjects, not for a preacher but a poet? They are not, we affirm, dreams of an excited fancy; and we hope it will be soon seen, that they are "profitable for reproof, for correction,

and for instruction in righteousness." If there has been attention to our previous remarks, it must be acknowledged, that, to derive any other meaning from the words of our text, is, not only to give it an unsatisfactory and incorrect interpretation, but also, to contradict further information more or less explicit on the same subject, which may be derived from other portions of Holy Writ.

II. We now proceed, in the second place, to consider our text as furnishing the refutation of two errors, which, by the believing and unbelieving respectively, are commonly entertained with regard to the heavenly state.

The first of the errors to which we desire to call your attention, consists in the contemplation of heaven as a scene of inactivity, of luxurious and indolent repose. And this view of the future home prepared for the saints, unreasonable and mistaken though it be, is one which the believer may very easily, and perhaps excusably, be led to entertain. He turns with a harassed spirit from the afflictions and the toil of his present state, and looking to the abode, of which it may be as truly as beautifully said, that in it "the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest," he will think of nothing but the repose and peace, which it is promised he shall there enjoy. And so, he calms and delights his spirit with the prospect of a rest which never shall be broken, of quietness which shall never be disturbed. Those visions of

his future home which console him amidst his present woes thus exclude not only sin and sorrow, but also thoughtfulness and activity from its sacred precincts. He associates together, as though in a necessary connexion, the idea of exertion with weariness, of action with anxiety and fatigue; and so he deems of heaven, that its bliss were incomplete, its joys imperfect and disturbed, unless it should promise freedom from occupation as well as from labour and from pain, from activity as well as from sorrow and from sin. He will think of nothing in his Father's house except of its tranquil pleasures, of its unbroken and eternal peace. And it is an abode of peace; of deep and unutterable peace, even that "peace of God," which now "passeth understanding." But, because an abode of peace, it is not therefore of inaction; because a state of rest, it is not therefore of luxurious apathy, of indolence as well as of repose. Yet, such is the view which devout persons commonly entertain of heaven. With a mistaken, nay, we might even say, with an imbecile view of that high state, they suppose that the loftier powers of the immortal nature are there continually inert, its nobler faculties for ever undeveloped and unemployed. They regard the eternal city as a scene of listless joy, and its inhabitants as though slumbering through eternity, without occupation or pursuit. But against this notion—a notion which is not more erroneous than pernicious—our text is plainly and powerfully

opposed. For, "they serve him day and night." They serve Him! These immortal and angelic beings serve the God of heaven. And how can we think or speak of the service in which such faculties as theirs must be engaged? But "they serve him day and night." There is no cessation, because no weariness, in the exercise of their lofty powers. They have the universe for their scene of action, and eternity for the period of its continuance; and they are, too, the ministering spirits of Him, of whom it is wonderfully said, that He inhabiteth the boundlessness of time and space. Who, then, we say, shall think worthily of their employments, the employments of immortal beings traversing creation in the service of their God? And yet, though we are necessarily ignorant of the nature of their engagements; though we cannot conjecture the scenes and circumstances of their activity; it is clear, as we have already seen, that the same faculties which they exerted here, in an improved and expanded state it is true, yet the same faculties, are employed in the occupations of their future home. The heavenly nature is not composed of new elements, but of the old elements expanded and improved. The mortal is not to be created afresh, but to be "clothed with immortality." The very powers which the saint has exerted here in the service of his God, he will exert in heaven; the very affections which he has developed here, he will again evince in that higher

condition of his being. And hence appears the importance of his taking the scriptural and true account of that condition. For, looking to heaven, not as a paradise of indolent delight, but as a scene of devout activity,—of activity, too, in which his human faculties, endowed with immortal vigour, will be employed—looking thus to heaven, he derives strength and stimulus from the future prospects of his being. With such anticipations of his immortal state, his thoughts do not roam, guided by earth-taught fancies, through scenes of inert and listless joy; he dreams not of wandering an indolent devotee through the groves and palaces of heaven, and so derives no drowsy and enfeebling influence from his contemplation of the celestial state; but, he thinks of serving God day and night, and that in this service, unembarrassed by the defects and frailties of his earthly nature, he will exert the very faculties with which he is now endowed. It may be, to search with devout thought, as now, into the abstruser mysteries of the providence of God; it may be, to contend, in reliance on Divine strength, as now, with natures hostile to his government and power; it may be, to perform in Christ-like charity, as now, some injunction of Almighty love. All these commissions befit the royalty and priesthood of creation; but in these, we are told, he is to share; and it is well, that he should think, and think often, of these powers and pursuits of his immortal being. Surely, such

thoughts will strengthen him in his present fulfilment of duty and in his present struggles with temptation; surely, they will ennoble him amidst the meanness, and console him amidst the misery of his present state; surely, if he reflects that he is hereafter to stand forth a king and priest unto the Lord, he will strive to walk worthy of his future rank, and not forget the dignity and holiness of such a high vocation. And thus will he derive a safe, because a scriptural influence from his meditations on the state, into which, redeemed by the blood of Christ, he will hereafter enter; thus will his prospects of heaven make him more diligent amidst the duties, as well as more patient amidst the trials of earth; and when he departs hence, he will feel that it is, in the emphatic language of Scripture, to go unto "his own place;" to move amidst scenes and society, with the spirit of which he has already sympathized; to take a higher share of the very labours, in which already he has borne a part<sup>3</sup>.

Now besides this general reason, on which we have insisted, we might, if time would permit, set before you many special arguments on behalf of our assertion, that a contemplation of the heavenly state as a scene of activity in the service of God, will exert a powerful influence on the spirit, most favourable to its cultivation of Christian holiness

<sup>3</sup> Note B in Appendix.

and charity and zeal. But we must pass on to notice, briefly, the second error, to which, as held by careless and unbelieving men, our text stands in manifest opposition.

There is, then, a very prevalent notion among those who give but a careless heed to the truths of Christianity, that, whenever they choose to do so, they may avail themselves of the provision of the Gospel, to secure an entrance into heaven, and that a simple aspiration or movement of their spirits will be sufficient for this end. They conceive, that by a single and independent act of their own will, they may, at whatever period they think proper to select, accomplish the whole work of their salvation, and secure an abode among the "many mansions" of the eternal city. The whole of religion with which they desire, or, as they think, need to be concerned, is just that portion which will enable them to avoid the shame and punishment of hell, and to obtain admission within the gates of heaven. Without being anxious to enjoy the favour and the smile of God, they yet wish to escape his anger and his frown; and this, as they suppose, they may at any time effect by a single act of repentance or of faith, by attendance on a sacrament, or even by the utterance of a prayer. This error, flagrant and fatal as it is, has, we say, extensive prevalence; it is the very shape into which thousands, if questioned, would instantly and confidently put their religious prospects and persuasions; and

with abundant sophistry will those who hold it commonly set themselves to defend it from attack. With this sophistry, we have neither time nor inclination to contend ; though nothing can be easier than to show how flimsy are the materials of which it is composed. We pass by the arguments which would defend this error, and affirm, that it stands contradicted by every page of Scripture, yes, and by every presage of conscience and every principle of reason. Now our text stands among the foremost of those passages of Scripture, any one of which is sufficient for its refutation ; for the text clearly sets forth this truth—that a preparation of heart and intellect for the engagements of heaven is necessary to secure an admission within its sacred precincts ; and to this truth, among others, the error we are considering stands utterly opposed. It implies an entire forgetfulness of the scene of heavenly occupations. The redeemed “ serve God day and night ;” but, Where do they carry on this unwearied service ? “ In his temple.” It is in the places of heavenly worship that their labours are performed ; they are “ priests unto God,” while they perform His will ; and along with every effort in His service, are they continually offering up the sacrifices of supplication and of praise. How, then, can any share their labours, if not imbued with the spirit which befits those who dwell for ever in a sanctuary ? how co-operate in their employments, if unaccustomed to the exercise of the



piety with which they must ever be performed? How can any abide for ever as in a temple in heaven, if destitute of affection for the temples of earth? How can any join the Church above, in the perpetual adoration of its active and joyous being, if the liturgies of the Church below have been a weariness to their souls? Nay, how can any expect to love and serve God at all, with the cheerful affection which He must then receive, unless they love and serve Him now? How can they expect even to see Him, and to listen to His commands, if they love not communion with Him here, and obey not now the precepts He enjoins? There is a saying, which is not more old and pointed than true, that "heaven is a prepared place for a prepared people;" and it is the principle of this saying, as vindicated by our text, that we desire to set in opposition to the fatal error we are endeavouring to expose. It is not enough to desire admission into heaven; we must seek after a meetness for its duties and its joys. It is not enough to wish for a share of its abiding pleasures; we must strive that our spirits may be made ready for that participation, that we be clothed in the "wedding garment," in which alone we can sit down "at the marriage supper of the Lamb." Nay, it is not enough even that we desire to share its high employments, unless we remember that it is in the temple of the Lord that we are to "serve Him day and night;" that the scene of our engage-

ments, though that should be the universe itself, must also be the scene of our constant and joyous adoration.

My brethren, there is only one method by which this preparation for heaven may be secured : there must be a confident trust in the atonement of Christ as the sole means of our reconciliation with God, and earnest prayer to Him, that for the sake of this atonement, the sanctifying influence of the Holy Spirit may be vouchsafed unto our souls. Thus, and thus alone, can we be made “ meet for the inheritance of the saints in light ;” thus, and thus alone, can we be clothed with the “ wedding garment,” in which we may sit down at “ the marriage supper of the Lamb ;” thus, and thus alone, can an “ entrance be ministered unto us into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.” If without this preparation, then, when He shall hereafter come, we shall be speechless to His every inquiry ; yes, and without a syllable in our defence shall be led away into the “ outer darkness” of His wrath. For we were warned beforehand,—I warn you now, I give warning to myself—that only those who are redeemed by faith in the blood of Christ, and who have been made holy by His Spirit, can be admitted into the mansions which He has prepared for His people. And so, although we have spoken much of those high abodes, and of the occupations of their glorified inhabitants, yet, without Christian faith and

holiness, not one of us can have any practical experience of the subjects of our discourse; our meditations have been vain, vain and idle as a dream, unless they lead us in humility to Him, whose mercy alone can admit us into heaven, whose grace alone can make us meet for its occupations and its joys.

## SERMON III.

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### CHRIST AT NAZARETH.

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LUKE ii. 5.

“And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them.”

THIS passage in the history of our blessed Lord might very properly be adduced in proof of His careful regard to the social and domestic relations which He sustained while He was on earth. He is here represented to us in His character as a son; and we are told that He dwelt with His parents, and was subject unto them: He continued in His own home, and honoured His father and His mother by submitting to whatever rules and injunctions they might lawfully impose. Our Lord carefully fulfilled all those duties which were appropriate to the human character in which He appeared. As a friend, He was affectionate and sincere; as a subject, He was obedient to the powers that be; and in the text we are told, that He was also dutiful and submissive as a son. His

earthly character, exemplary in all other respects, was especially so in this. And we need seek for no better comment on the commandment, Children be obedient to your parents, and for no stronger motive to its performance, than the comment and the motive which Christ Himself furnished in His home at Nazareth, where, as the Evangelist informs us, He abode in a state of subjection to the natural guardians of His youth.

We do not, however, propose on this occasion to dwell solely on our Lord's regard to the filial relation in which He stood. The words before us not only furnish this lesson, one of high importance as we readily admit, but other lessons, which, if they be not of greater value, are at least of more general interest and of wider application. They are derivable, not from a single particular of our Lord's estate at Nazareth, but from His whole condition and employments while He abode there. We do not propose to regard Him solely in His character as a son ; but, as dwelling for thirty years in the position of a member of the lower classes of society, and as engaged during that period in the ordinary and despised occupations of humble life. It is with His civil, rather than with His domestic condition ; with the performance of the duties appropriate to His social rank, rather than of those which belonged to Him as a son, that we shall engage your attention ; and we think, that if God shall enable us to bring out with clearness the lessons

which, in this view of it, are furnished by our text, they will be found profitable to us all, but chiefly to the poorer among our brethren, for instruction in righteousness, and for the supply of strong motives to meekness and seriousness and diligence of life.

Our method of prosecuting the subject will be extremely simple. We propose first, to meditate on the instruction which is furnished by the condition; and secondly, on that which is furnished by the employments of our Lord during His sojourn at Nazareth, keeping in mind that state of subjection to His parents, in which, as St. Luke informs us, He there abode.

The same Evangelist also informs us, that our Lord continued in this state of subjection until He was thirty years of age. We are told, moreover, that it was at this period of life when He began to preach, and the general inference derived from the whole of His history accords with the intimation of the text, that until then, He dwelt constantly in His parents' home. This appears to have been His perpetual abode, and the society of His parents and their friends appears to have been the only society in which He mingled. When, in after years, He exercised His public ministry in His own country, His hearers employed their familiarity with His person and circumstances, as a reason why they should not give heed to His instructions; "Is not this the carpenter's son, and his brethren and sisters,

are they not with us?" There is no reason to believe that during the whole period of His private life, (one occasion only excepted,) He was ever absent from His family and home ; that He ever travelled into other countries, or evinced any desire to look on any other scenes than those with which He was familiar from His youth. The single occasion, as it seems, on which He was separated from His family, is carefully named and accounted for by the Evangelist. If any other separation from His kindred, more lengthened, had taken place, we can scarcely doubt that it also would have been recorded. And besides, in the seclusion of Nazareth, there was full occupation for His mind ; we mean for the human, as distinguished from the Divine mind of Christ. As He looked forward on His future course, crowded as it was with the great events which belonged to man's redemption, and extending through scenes over which angels bent with interest and awe, there would, we may say with reverence, be no curiosity and no leisure for enquiry respecting other circumstances than those in the midst of which He dwelt and with which He was personally concerned. But it is not our purpose to reflect on the mysterious and absorbing thoughts which were present to the mind of the Redeemer, during His seclusion of thirty years in Nazareth of Galilee. At present we wish you only to observe, that it was His father's home which He inhabited, and His father's rank of life in which He abode, and the society of His father's associates

in which He mingled. Amidst the seclusion and privations of humble life, lay His path and His allotment. He dwelt there as a poor man, and from among the poor were chosen His associates. He suffered their wants, and dwelt in their humility, and submitted to their reproach. He was glad with them, doubtless, in their innocent festivities, and sorrowful with them in their distress, and was in all respects like unto His brethren. He might have moved in the courts of princes, and have consorted with the noble and the powerful among His fellow men; or have frequented the schools of philosophy, and taught the sages of the earth the folly of their wisdom; or have dwelt amidst the comfort and competence of the middling ranks of life; or He might have retired to the deserts and shunned all intercourse with men: but instead of any of these courses, He took, for thirty years, his station among the poor, and dwelt with them. He abode as a mechanic in Nazareth of Galilee, was subject to His father and His mother, and continued amidst the humility and privations of His parental home.

Now if we are justified in seeking for lessons of practical wisdom from the circumstances of our Lord in later life, there surely is no reason why we should neglect the instruction which is furnished by His position and abode before His public ministry commenced. If He had lived till then in a conspicuous position, and had taken rank as a sovereign, or a statesman, or a sage, we should at once have availed



ourselves of whatever instruction His condition might have seemed to furnish. But why should we not do so now? Is no truth and is no wisdom taught us by the voluntary submission of our Lord for thirty years, to the humility of His father's home? Do His character and His career, for so long a period, instruct us in no lesson? If it be true that He came to furnish us with a pattern of obedience in His life, as well as with a propitiation for our transgressions in His death, was His life, through by far the greater portion of it, entirely useless to this end? This cannot be believed; and we shall soon see that the very opposite of such a supposition is the true. There are most important truths to be learned from the voluntary and long continued abode of Christ among the poor. For, first, did He not authorise the condition of which He Himself partook? Did He not effectively give His sanction to the natural gradations of society, by Himself dwelling in one of the lowest of those gradations? Did He not clearly teach that it is not contrary to the will of God that one class of His creatures should abide in poverty, and so that others should abide in wealth, by Himself submitting to that poverty, and by aiding to supply the wants and to fulfil the wishes of those who enjoyed that wealth. If He had dwelt for thirty years amongst mankind as a sovereign, or a statesman, or a sage, we should at once have concluded that He authorised the condition He had chosen, and gave His sanction to the

institution of royalty, or to legislative power, or to the separation of a body of men devoted to the pursuit of truth. But, in living as a mechanic with His father, did He not give as explicit a sanction to the existence, not of abject, but of decent and industrious poverty? Did He not thereby teach us, if the expression may be used, a lesson of civil economy, and authorize the existence in a community of a humble, but not degraded, of a submissive, but not a servile or a suffering class of poor? And this is a lesson which the poor man may learn with much profit, in days of wild declamation about equality in earthly enjoyments and possessions. Our Lord practically and powerfully, as practically and powerfully as He could, even by Himself dwelling quietly among the poor for thirty years, contradicted these fanatical declaimers, and no poor Christian man can have a better antidote against their foolish and delusive sayings, than is presented by that fact; a fact which will furnish the humble follower of Jesus Christ with a strong and satisfactory reason for being contented with his condition in a well ordered community, even though that condition should approximate closely to the lowest.

But this long continued abode of our Lord with His parents, furnishes this second lesson,—that those whose lot is in the midst of poverty, should patiently endure its privations, its necessary privations, and meekly submit to its reproach. Let it be granted that it sorely tries the faith and patience

of even a Christian man, to stand by, the toil and care-worn spectator of ease and luxury in which he may not participate, of enjoyments which he cannot share ; while want, and it may be sorer affliction, is in his own home ; to go abroad and look upon the affluence and pleasure, and submit perhaps to the cruel scorn, of men less virtuous and worthy than himself. It is a sore trial ; and his is a noble and heroic character, who in such circumstances, can in patience possess his soul. But, did Christ set no example, and teach no lesson, and furnish no motive by which that trial may be wisely and well endured. Yes, truly, He did this ; and when the poor man, who takes his principles of conduct from the Gospel, feels rising within himself the strong emotions of impatience and indignation at what he may deem the hard features of his lot, let him think of the seclusion of his Lord for thirty years amid the humility and privations of his father's home, and that for all this time He sat not, though He might have done, at the table of the rich, nor shared in their fascinating pleasures and gay pursuits, but submitted, it may be, to many wants, and endured, it may be, much contempt. Let the poor man think of this, and he will derive patience and strength as he thus reflects on his condition, *This home of mine, alas ! that I should call this miserable shelter home ; it is no abode of luxury and joy, fortune never alighted at my threshold, pleasure makes no stay with me, but want is my constant*

*inmate, and unrelieved affliction is often within these wretched walls. Yes, but in such a home did my Saviour dwell for thirty years; and He, too, endured the privations with which I am so familiar, and submitted to the scorn which mortifies my pride: shall I then repine? Nay, rather, I will thank Him for the lesson and example He has set before me, and I will seek for larger supplies of grace, that I may follow with more meekness in His steps, and endure more patiently what He endured.*

Thus far, however, we have only considered the condition of our Lord during His abode at Nazareth. It is now our part to reflect upon His employments there, and we think it possible to derive from such reflections a great practical lesson of almost universal application. There are, as is well known, many traditions which profess to furnish a circumstantial account of His occupations for these thirty years, but they possess no authority, and are, on good grounds, believed to be mere fictions, invented in a period long subsequent to the apostolic times<sup>1</sup>. We shall, therefore, found our remarks solely on the assertion of the Evangelist, that our Lord abode until the commencement of His ministry in subjection to His parents at their own home. We may thence fairly conclude that He was occupied with the ordinary avocations in which His father was engaged. He was in subjection to His parents.

<sup>1</sup> Note C in Appendix.

Now at this period they were unquestionably ignorant of His real character. They would, therefore, impose on Him, we may conclude, such labours and employments as were appropriate to young persons in His rank of life ; and St. Luke's assertion of His subjection to them, of course implies that He fulfilled whatever task they might enjoin. Moreover, the Jewish laws or regulations, required Him to follow some profession<sup>2</sup> ; and He was afterwards recognised by the people as having worked at His father's trade. They not only said, "Is not this the carpenter's son," but "Is not this the carpenter<sup>3</sup>." If He had been employed in any other manner, apparently more in accordance with the character of his mission upon earth, it would, doubtless, have been mentioned in the narrative of His life. Our conclusion, therefore, is well sustained. He abode until the commencement of His ministry, occupied in manual employments, daily busied with the humble task of a mechanic, moving with quietness and submission, but withal diligently, in one of the lowliest paths of life ; and this, not occasionally, or for a short period, but during thirty years ; though He might, if He had chosen, have appeared in a high estate of publicity and power, and practised, what we call, the sublimer virtues, as a prince, or a patriot, or a sage.

<sup>2</sup> Grotius in Matth. xiii. 55. Lightfoot's Hebrew and Talmudical Exercitations on St. Mark.

<sup>3</sup> Mark vi. 3.

Now we say, He thereby taught to all men one of the most valuable and impressive of His lessons. And it is one, too, which well deserves our close and serious attention. For, perhaps, there are few errors by which we are more commonly and unconsciously misled, than that of regarding the ordinary and humble avocations of life as worthy only of contempt, and as affording no field for the exercise of such virtue, as may rightly claim our reverence and our praise. The common business of every day, the transient, and, as we consider, the trivial occupations of the larger portion of our time, especially if our avocations be in the humble walks of life; these, if we do not foolishly regard them with contempt, are commonly spoken of as duties which must be got through with, rather than as duties, which, as truly as those we consider higher, require to be well and wisely done.—*The occupations of a general, or a statesman, or a king, have some importance, but how petty and how trivial are my pursuits!*—How frequently does each one of us reflect in this manner on his common occupations; and, how naturally do we continue in the same strain!—*The higher walks of life; yes, there is some occasion and scope for virtue there, but none in the narrow and secluded path in which I am called, or, I may say, condemned to walk.* Brethren, there are very few of us, if any, who do not constantly speak and reason in this manner. The labourer, with such

feelings, will look upon the tradesman; and the tradesman, on the merchant and the lawyer; and these again, on the ranks of life superior to theirs; each class on the one above, as engaged in occupations which are of superior importance, and which furnish ampler and higher ground for the exercise of lofty virtue, for the manifestation of the nobler qualities of the human soul. Now, we might shew that it is more than probable that such thoughts indicate nothing else, than that we are habituated to take relative, and not absolute views of the things around us; and, if it were our purpose, we might even adduce much argument to prove that the man who helps to build a house is engaged on a work not less important and essential to the well-being of society, than that of the man who is member of a senate; and that the woman who trains for a community one virtuous child, has done as good service to that community as the general who conducts its wars. But this is not our purpose. We are now engaged on higher and more certain ground. We assert that the moral aspect of every action and occupation in which we are engaged is alone the true; and that we judge rightly of the importance of our engagements, only when we regard them in that aspect, and try them by a moral rule. For, this life, what else is it, but a scene of moral and spiritual discipline, which is to prepare us for one of two future worlds? And, all the incidents and occupations of

life, however trivial they may seem, how else can we regard them, except as circumstances of this discipline, as parts of a vast instrumentality, by which we are to be made ready for a scene of abiding holiness, or for one of abiding evil. The truth is, therefore, that every act we perform is of great and permanent importance ; so that, we cannot do a trivial thing ; the most ordinary deed of the humblest person in this assembly, is a deed of highest moment ; for, it manifests the character of his soul, and is a means whereby that character may be injured or improved. This is true of all our occupations. The minstrel may not chant them in his songs ; the annalist may pass them by, as unworthy of his regard, with no note of censure or of praise ; but, are those deeds which form the burden of the poet's verse, or which the historian blazons to posterity in lofty eloquence, are such deeds, because man so regards them, those only which have an important character and consequence ? No, truly ; for, they, equally with the most common of our acts, possess but one character which is truly momentous, are followed by only one consequence which is truly great ; the character of an instrumentality in the moral discipline of the soul, the consequence of an advancement in fitness or in unfitness for the heavenly world. And hence, especially, is it evident, that we err in regarding the humble avocations of life as furnishing narrower scope, or fewer occasions for lofty virtue, than the



higher. This earthly scene, which is rightly regarded only when it is regarded as a scene of discipline for one of two future worlds, is furnished throughout, in every department, with means which may be employed in preparation for one or other of these worlds. If it be true, as who can doubt it is, that the soul of every man is of equal value in the sight of God; that He regards not our conventional distinctions of rank, expedient or necessary as they may be to us; but, as truly wills the sanctification of a peasant as of a prince; then, it is also true, that He has given to both of these, as His responsible creatures upon earth, equal opportunities of cultivating and maturing that holiness, without which, we are told that, neither of them can see the Lord. He hath furnished high and ample opportunity of making great moral attainments, of perfecting holiness, in the lowliest as in the loftiest occupations of those whom He will hereafter judge; so that, the man of humble life may become as virtuous and as wise, as the man who consorts with princes, or controls the affairs of states. And, heaven will be hereafter peopled with men from all the ranks into which humanity is now divided. Among the glorified saints who will hereafter crowd the same streets of the celestial city, and join in the same anthem of ceaseless praise, there will be many, who trod on earth the lowliest walks of life, as well as many, we trust, whose paths lay in the highest, and many, whose

voices upon earth were only heard in the accents of servitude and of submission, as well as many who here spoke only that they might command and be obeyed. These lessons, on the importance of all the occupations of life, even of the most ordinary and of the humblest, and, on their equal usefulness for the purposes of moral discipline, are impressively taught us by the lowly employments of our Lord at Nazareth for thirty years. If He had moved in a higher sphere, or had been engaged in higher duties, the erroneous impression of which we have spoken, respecting high spheres and high duties, would have been confirmed, and men might then have sighed with more reason for such opportunities as their Lord had chosen. But He took the lowliest paths of life, and occupied Himself with the lowest of its duties; and, in acting thus, He authenticated the reasons we have endeavoured to set forth as opposed to that erroneous impression. If He had been employed for thirty years in the duties of high rank and office, there would have been some show of reason in our common notion respecting the superior importance of such employments, and the superior opportunities they furnish for high attainments in virtue; but, He lived and laboured for that long period as an ordinary mechanic; and, He thereby taught us that the occupations of a mechanic, even, are of high importance—of high importance, surely, if the Son of God thought them worthy of His diligent atten-

tion for thirty years. He taught us, too, that they may furnish high occasions for the exercise of virtue; and surely this must be admitted, since it was amidst them that He advanced in favour with God and man, and since the character in which He came forth from His retirement, was the most perfect character the world has ever seen.

On these lessons we might dwell much longer, if time would permit, but we must now hasten to conclude. Permit me, however, to observe, that they are lessons not merely of abstract, but also of practical interest, and that their influence must be looked for, not so much in the correctness of our opinions, as in the diligence and blamelessness of our daily life. If Christ authorised the condition of poverty, then the Christian poor man may not rail at the ordinance which puts him in an inferior position to his fellow men; and if Christ endured the privations of poverty, this must teach the Christian poor man to cherish patience amidst the hard circumstances of his lot. If Christ diligently performed the lowliest of duties for thirty years, this should teach us all not to look with carelessness or with contempt on the most ordinary, and what we consider, the most trivial of our employments, but that we should strive rather to improve them, as Christ did His, for our advancement in wisdom and holiness, and in favour with God and man. But, brethren, His special grace must prevent and follow us, to put into our hearts these good purposes and

desires, and to enable us to bring the same to good effect. And this grace, if we would obtain it, we must seek in His own appointed way. The Church has brought before us this morning, the subject on which I have been speaking <sup>4</sup>; and the Church now invites you to come on this first Sunday of another year, to the Holy Communion, where you may obtain grace and strength to practise the lessons which this subject has suggested to our minds. For let it never be forgotten, that this blessed sacrament is no merely commemorative rite, but that every worthy communicant, when he receives the sacred emblems within his body, does also, at the same time, and as truly, receive effectual grace into his soul. And speaking of this truth, I cannot do better than speak in the words of one of the wisest and holiest of men. The great, and as he has been well called, the judicious Hooker, writes thus:—"That saving grace which Christ originally is or hath for the general good of his whole Church, by sacraments He severally deriveth unto every member thereof. Sacraments serve as the instruments of God, to that end and purpose; moral instruments, the use whereof is in our own hands, the effect in his." "We take not Baptism nor the Eucharist for bare resemblances or memorials of things absent, neither for naked signs and testimonies, assuring us of grace received before, but (as they are indeed,

<sup>4</sup> Preached on the first Sunday after Epiphany.

and in verity) for means effectual; whereby God, when we take the sacraments, delivereth into our hands that grace available unto eternal life, which grace the sacraments represent or signify <sup>5</sup>.”

I ask you, then, if ye have a penitent heart and lively faith, to draw near, and take this holy sacrament for your comfort and support. The act will be a happy and a hopeful beginning of another year. And it will strengthen you for the practice of those lessons which Christ dwelt at Nazareth, in great humility, to teach us; which lessons, too, we must practise as well as learn, if in our hearts, as well as with our voices, we call Him Lord.

<sup>5</sup> Hook. Ecc. Pol., book v. chap. 57.

## SERMON IV.

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### THE WONDROUS WORKS OF GOD.

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JOB xxxvii. 14.

“Stand still, and consider the wondrous works of God.”

WE propose, on this occasion, to engage your minds with the consideration which is here enjoined ; but before we proceed with this design, we wish you to observe the significance of the words at the beginning of our text. “Stand still,—and consider the wondrous works of God.” The injunction, “stand still,” implies that the individual who is here exhorted to consider the Divine works, was, for the most part, in such a state of hurry and excitement, as unfitted him for the earnest contemplation which is enjoined. There was uttered to him, therefore, in his course of restlessness, an admonition to suspend, for a while, his busy occupations,—to pause in his employments, that he might look around him and consider the world, in the midst of which he lived, and moved, and had his being. And we


must all feel that this admonition does now appropriately precede the public utterance of the injunction which the text contains, for how few are there who do so resist the influence of that restlessness and haste which especially characterize our days, as to attempt the formation of habits, or even to engage in occasional exercises of calm and pious meditation. In our marts of commerce, in our crowded streets, how few ever stay attentively to listen with their hearts to what the heavens and the earth are continually telling of their great Creator! In this vast city the works of God are manifest: many of the most wondrous of them are assembled here as subjects on which curiosity or science may fix its attentive gaze. But how very few of the men we meet with appear to live as if they had ever reflected that the wonders they behold were devised, and are upheld, by an Eternal Being, who is always present where we are. Or even amidst tranquil and rural scenes, how naturally every reflection appears to arise and to be indulged, except the reflection that God made everything we behold, and that He now is working in each scene according to the counsels of His will. For, whether in crowded or in solitary places, well nigh every one appears to have some object of gain or pleasure, which requires to be pursued with an impetuous haste that leaves him no opportunity of giving one moment's hearing to that speech which day utters unto day, or one glance on that know-

ledge which the night shows forth. And therefore we may earnestly and appropriately repeat now the words which the wise son of Barachel addressed to Job, and ask that you who listen will, for a few moments, "stand still;" that you will call home your wandering thoughts, and bring your spirits into a state of attention and repose; that at this very juncture of your mortal course, you will pause and think of the facts and circumstances by which you are actually encompassed; that you will look on surrounding things as Christians should look on them, and carefully heed and ponder the inferences you may derive from this thoughtful observation.

Now first we wish to remind you of the number, and variety, and magnitude of the Divine works. Our position, at any moment, may be regarded as the centre of a circle almost infinite in its extent, which is filled throughout with the wondrous results of the working of Divine Omnipotence. At this, or at any other time, if we look at the things which are immediately around us, and then proceed outward, further and further, till we reach the utmost limits to which thought can carry us, in each step of our progression we shall meet with something which appears more marvellous, the more closely it is examined. What impressive wonders, for instance, are now present to our mental view in this very place! Just think of the process which is going on in each person every instant, when he breathes; of the marvellous composition of our



atmosphere, and the equally marvellous construction of those parts of our bodies which are fitted to inhale it. Or who can look thoughtfully on any one of the human bodies now present here, without amazement at, we may say, the *innumerable* wonders which are crowded and compacted within its limits. Or again, let me ask you to think a moment of the skill and strength which were evinced in the construction of this edifice, and let this thought be followed by the enquiry, But who conferred that strength and skill? We may proceed a step outwards, and ask you to think of what is now contained within the limits of this vast metropolis; of the million and a half of human beings who are assembled close around us, each one, remember, as fearfully and wonderfully made as we are; each one the subject of a moral government, the candidate now on probation for a higher state; each one as carefully tended and watched as we know ourselves to be. Then let us recollect the numberless instrumentalities which are at work around us for the continuance and convenience of life, and that each of them is the result of properties and laws of nature which God has established, and that each of them, too, has been contrived by an intellect which He has given. And passing from this city, let us reflect on the general aspect of the world in which we live. In spirit let us again roam through the scenes which perhaps, in person, we have explored. There are the corn-fields, and the pas-



tures, and the flocks ; the meadow, and the valley, and the stream, reposing in their serenity, or smiling in their joy. There is the lake with the islets, which seem to sleep in peace upon its bosom, and the ocean, made lovely by the zephyrs which are gently breathed on it from heaven. And there are the wild, and the rugged scenes of nature ; the mountain, and the cataract, and the storm. But these are wonders which only cover the surface of our globe ; we scarcely know any thing of the wonders which are within. The interior mysteries of this earth are at present but the subjects of our dim conjecture. With all the perceived wonders, however, which are crowded on its surface, and the imagined wonders which lie within its depths, we know it is carried along in its annual course with a speed which we cannot imagine ; and that in company with other worlds, our world performs the wondrous revolutions, which it has been the highest triumph of man's wisdom to explain. When our minds are thus carried into the vast expanse around us, we look there on wondrous works, such that the wondrousness of all others seems lost in the comparison. The mind falters and faints in an attempt to dwell, for a few minutes even, on the conception that the regions of infinity in which we live, are actually crowded with worlds, whose magnitude and magnificence immeasurably surpass our own ; so that the wonders which are existing here, must be multiplied by a number, which arithmetic cannot express,

before we could give any thing like an adequate statement of the present operations of Almighty Power<sup>1</sup>. And then, if we strive to think of all these worlds in unceasing motion, no incertitude ever in their movements, no disturbance ever in those harmonies which make up what hath been well called the “music of the spheres;” if we strive to think, also, of the innumerable ages through which all this has been going on, and that still every thing appears as if in its primeval vigour, with no symptoms of decrepitude, no prospect of cessation; if we strive to think of this, adding to the mighty thought the recollection of what we saw, as we passed from this very spot where we are now assembled, to the utmost limits of creation, and remembering all the while, that all are the works of one Being,—the wondrous works of God,—indeed we cannot do better than turn from a contemplation which is absolutely painful through its vastness, and mentally lift up a prayer, that His Divine Spirit will enable us to consider aright, these His wondrous works, and will impress upon our hearts the wise and pious inferences which we may derive from such consideration.


With this prayer our contemplations will not, let me remind you, have been unfitted for this sacred time and place. We might, indeed, look upon the objects I have enumerated, with an eye

<sup>1</sup> Note D in Appendix.

to perceive nothing but their beauty and their grandeur. Our meditations might be altogether an affair of science, or sentiment, or taste; and if so, certainly it would not be profitable or appropriate to give such meditations an expression here; but surely we may, too, go abroad amidst these wonders, distinctly in our characters as Christian men, and surely we may, too, derive thence materials for strictly Christian thought. If others, in the contemplation of surrounding objects, find an employment which is specially suited to their tastes,—if the poet can everywhere hear voices of sweetest melody, and the painter perceive everywhere forms of loveliness and grace, and the philosopher find everywhere subjects for his most careful thought,—then, surely, to the Christian also, as he traverses the world, there must be a certain and a definite aspect in which all things are beheld. The creatures and the scenes on which he looks, must surely, to the man of piety, as well as to the man of imagination, or to the man of reason, have some distinctive character. He must surely find some echo and some harmony in the objects which are without, accordant and responsive to the thoughts which are within his breast; or of all men, is a Christian the only one who can walk in spirit through creation, unconscious of some great and supreme emotion which its scenes excite, and to his mind alone, of all others, have they no high significance, no overpowering expression of wisdom

and of truth? This cannot be believed, There is, undoubtedly, some distinguishing aspect in which the Christian, in his character as such, regards the world in which he lives, some certain and specific expression, which its scenery and inhabitants wear in his regards: there are some feelings which rise supreme in his heart whenever he considers these, and some thoughts which they at once excite within his mind. In a word, there are meditations upon nature which are distinctly Christian, and the utterance of these may, we think, always come well and wisely from a Christian minister, and always be listened to with propriety and with profit by a Christian congregation. This is the kind of consideration, with the inferences it suggests, which we have now been anxious to bring before your minds, and to which we still wish for your sustained and serious attention.

What then, let me ask, is the first, and truest, and most important thought, which the objects and the scenes we have enumerated do suggest? We are in the midst of all these as reasonable creatures, ourselves made, as we know full well, fearfully and wonderfully made by their Creator. We are amidst them as redeemed creatures, too, a fact, which in no time or place, may by a Christian man be forgotten. We are in the midst of them as redeemed creatures, redeemed by the same Being who gave us faculties to perceive the wonders on which we have been looking, and hearts to be affected by their



power. We ask, then, what is the first and truest and most important thought which they suggest? Now we cannot hesitate for one moment in assigning this thought. It is, that these wondrous works are, all of them, nothing less than manifestations of the attributes and the energy of an Omnipresent God. The thoughtful Christian will, first of all, recollect that he is in the midst of the works of Deity, that Deity is existent and active in every thing which he beholds. This, in his case, is no slight and inefficient feeling, no merely formal and vague admission. The truth is by him continually recognised, and vividly experienced, and clearly understood. His reason joins with revelation to tell him, that, In the beginning God made the heavens and the earth, and all things which are therein. There must have been a time, he knows, when this earth and these heavens had no existence, and when even the materials of them were not in being, and therefore, a beginning, he is sure, there must have been, a definite era, when the beings and the worlds which now crowd the universe were devised and created by an Almighty Power. He knows too, upon as clear and solid grounds, that this same Power now upholds all the things He has created, and that He works in them all, after the counsels of His will. It is true, as the Christian will admit, that the harmony of the scenes on which he looks may be ascribed to the operation of certain laws; but then he acknowledges that these laws have no

personality and no power, that they can only in fair reason be regarded as constituting the mode in which some being separate from the universe is acting in its wide domains, the rule by which an Infinite Energy is continually employed. He never falls into that enormous error which some self-styled philosophers have sanctioned, of putting the statutes of the universe in the place of its Sovereign, of assigning the regularity of its motion as the reason why Creation moves, and the order of its agency as the cause of its restless but harmonious action<sup>1</sup>. But he regards all nature's laws as the counsels of a will which is working every where by its own eternal and inherent might; and so they carry him at once to that great Being, by whom they were enacted, and are now kept continually in force; they conduct him to the fountain of that energy, which is now flowing on in the channels they describe; wherever they are discerned they immediately suggest the universal agency of Him, who not only created all things, but by whom all things consist.

The Bible will furnish us with an emphatic representation of these conclusions. It declares that God is every where at work, creating, and preserving the things which He at first produced. "He doeth," we are told, now "doeth great things and things unsearchable, without number." "He

<sup>1</sup> Note E in Appendix.

sendeth forth his commandments upon the earth, and his word runneth very swiftly." "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." And, "In his hand is the soul of every living thing." This is language in which the Bible gives expression to the truth, that the Great God is present and powerful in every scene we behold. The objects and operations of nature do not indeed furnish sensible manifestations of the Supreme. They present no revelation of Deity before the eye, and they utter no voice like that which rolled from Sinai's mount. But yet to the spiritual perceptions of a Christian, they furnish every where tokens of His omnipresence; and every scene is loud in the utterance of His perfections and His praise, so that this man cannot look on a single object, from a flower to a forest, from the narrow boundaries of his home and neighbourhood on through the vast arena of creation, without the devout admission, *Thou God art here*. And wonderful, passing wonderful, are the reflections which this fact suggests! Wherever we may go in person or in thought, there does He beset us behind and before, and lay the hand of His omnipotence upon us. There is no scene into which we can escape from His pervading Spirit, or flee from His universal presence. He is abroad in the solitudes of space, peopling them with immortal life; in the scenes of creation, upholding in security and bliss the life He has inspired. His throne is in the



heavens, and His footstool on the earth, and the universe is the palace in which He dwells. His glance is in the lightning, His voice is in the storm. The beauties of the landscape are just the reflections of His smile ; and the murmurings of the zephyra, what are they but the sweeter whispers of His love ? And as He hath formed the human soul, and given its faculties to the intellect of man, so by His energy are they continually sustained in their wondrous operations. It is He who enables us to extort from creation its past history, and to predict the revolutions of its future being. Man becomes the prophet and historian of nature, because endowed with faculties which are sustained by the energy of nature's God. Nor may we forget His agency in the affairs of empires, how " the hearts of kings are under his rule and governance," and how " he maketh the wrath of man to praise him." In the history, too, of each one of us, His wisdom and His working may be discerned. He hath followed us, invisibly indeed, but with wisdom and goodness, He hath followed us from the first day of our existence to the present hour. He hath been the source of countless blessings, which we may ungratefully have overlooked ; of afflictions under which we may have murmured, though He sent them for our good. He hath been our guardian in unnumbered dangers of which we were unconscious. And He is with us now. His universal agency is in exercise at this moment in this

place; in me, and in each one of you. It is by means of His universally exerted power that I can now declare its wondrous operations, and that you can listen to my words. For as He devised the curious mechanism of these wondrous frames, so He upholds it now in its wondrous operation. The drawing of every breath, the throbbing of every pulse, the gaze of every eye, the intentness of every mind, all are the results of that Divine working which is present and effective even here, and if for a moment it should cease, I could no longer speak, and you no longer listen; this edifice, and the globe on which it stands, this whole assembly, these animated forms, these thoughtful spirits, all would return at once into the nothingness from which they rose.

The Christian, on whose meditations we have been dwelling, is vividly conscious of these truths. He knows as matter of clear and certain fact, that if he would he could not, in the language of the Psalmist, "go from the spirit, or flee from the presence" of this mighty Being. And, therefore, if we take the lowest view of his conduct, we should say that he has done well and wisely in considering the relation in which he stands to the all-present and all-powerful God, and in coming to terms of peace with Him, through Jesus Christ. We say he manifests a sound mind in the act of accepting the salvation which has been offered by Him, in whose universe he lives, and moves, and has his being;

for now he can pass with security and peace into every scene, while he thoughtfully acknowledges that God is there. And every object which thus suggests to him thoughts of God, reminds him, not of a stranger or of a foe, nay, but of a Father, in communion with whom he finds his chief delight, and whose favour is the source of his purest and most perfect bliss. And whenever he shall be removed to that world in which there are special manifestations of the all-present Being, in which the Christian will see face to face, and know as he is known, he will come before one whom he has already recognised and loved.—I was conscious, he will say, of Thy existence upon earth ; I walked always as in Thy presence ; my peace with Thee was then secured by Thy well-beloved Son ; I moved then amid the objects in which, to the eye of faith, Thy wisdom and Thy power were displayed ; and now faith is changed to sight, I look now on the open revelation of Thy glory ; but I am confident that before the same God I am yet secure, and that the same goodness which upheld and comforted me on earth, will continue to ensure my security and joy in heaven.

This may be the expression of a Christian's confidence when he reaches the future world. But how sad a thought does it suggest by contrast, of the future confusion of those by whom God has not been regarded here, who have passed through the scenes of earth, and never thought of Him by whom those scenes are animated and adorned, who

have completed their earthly existence, and never turned their minds to the Being by whom it was upheld ! The outward forms, and substances, and sounds of nature have attracted and absorbed their thoughts, but He who is working in all these has been passed by with utter disregard. The dwellers upon earth have each, in his turn, engaged their attention and attached their hearts; but the supreme occupant of earth, the Great Inhabitant of the universal frame, to His society they have never been attracted, of His presence they have been uncaring and unconscious all their lives. But who shall measure the folly of such forgetfulness and such neglect ? And how may we assail the insensibility which is thus evinced ? How may we open the eyes of those who refuse to see, and how unclothe the ears of those who will not hear ? Will words of argument or eloquence effect this change ? Shall we demonstrate to them the Omnipresence of the Deity, or make His wondrous working the theme of urgent declamation ? Shall we bring before them a single object of creation, an insect or a flower, and bidding them mark its beauty, its structure, its adaptations, shall we then call in the aid of reasoning to convince them of the fact, that it became thus lovely, and thus wondrous, by the workmanship of God, and that by an effort of His might, its existence and its charms are now continued as they were at first devised ? And then shall we ask them to lift up their eyes and look

upon the landscape in which this object is beheld, on the heavens which are above it, on the sun by which it is illumined, and bidding them note every feature of the grandeur and beauty they behold, shall we interrogate them as to how it could have arisen, if Almighty thought and energy had not called it into life, and how it could be sustained except that thought and energy were still in continual exertion? May we, in this manner, hope to disturb the slumbers of a careless generation, and dislodge the practical atheism of those who go through the world habitually unconscious of the fact, that there is a God? Ah! no, brethren, it is not in this way that such slumbers can ever be disturbed, that such atheism can ever be dislodged. The insect or the flower would preach its homily in vain; the voice of the landscape, the utterance of the heavens, would each be an idle sound. For it is altogether in another way that so great a work must be accomplished. It is sin which has blinded these eyes that see not, and deafened these ears which will not hear. And there must be a deep conviction of sin, and deep contrition for it too, before these eyes can be opened, before these ears can be unstopped. There must be an earnest and a thoughtful recognition of the fact, that sin has disordered and depraved our entire nature; that it has deadened our perceptions of all spiritual truth; that it prevents our going beyond the outward forms and substances of things, to the verities which

they represent; that it has made us love the din and discord of this world's affairs, in preference to the solemn voices which are heard through nature, but only by those who listen with their hearts; in a word, that it has alienated each spirit from its God. This fact must be seen, and it must be lamented; yes, brethren, and then it must lead us in humility and contrition to Jesus Christ, who, in the beautiful language of the prophet, "waiteth to be gracious" to those who will come to Him in sorrow for their sins. He stands ready always to receive such applicants as these. And so, whenever you will humbly recognise the fact you cannot deny, that you are a transgressor of the Divine law, and that sin has cast a blighting, deadening influence on every faculty of your mind, and on every feeling of your heart; whenever, with such a consciousness as this, you will bend your knees and say, "By Thine agony and bloody sweat, by Thy cross and passion, good Lord, deliver me from all my sins;" whenever this is done, why then I have authority for asserting, *that* deliverance will be effected; yes, and then Christ will send His Spirit in larger measure into your hearts, to "lead you into all truth," and to make you "know the things which are freely given to you of God." To the spiritually blind He will say, "Receive thy sight." The spiritually deaf He will take aside from the multitude, and looking on them He will say, "Ephphatha, Be thou opened." And then, the insect, and the flower,

and the landscape, and the heavens, will spread their true lesson and meaning before your unclouded sense.—The great God is our Creator, and by Him we are sustained.—As ye listen to this voice, since He is then reconciled to you by Jesus Christ, you will think of this God as your God, even unto death. And all nature then will be vocal in your ears with the anthems of what will seem to be a new creation. The heavens will be telling of the glory of the Lord, the earth in all its regions will echo the wondrous declaration, and every thing which hath breath will to your listening spirit seem to praise His name. Amid these harmonies below, you will be prepared for the everlasting harmonies above, so that it will not burst on astonished ears when you hear from the myriad choristers of heaven that great anthem of the skies, “Blessing, and honour, and glory, and power be unto Him that sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever.” My brethren, may we all be prepared at that moment, with a ready utterance, to say, Amen.

## S E R M O N V.

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### THE OFFICE OF REASON IN RELIGIOUS INQUIRIES.

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Acts xviii. 4.

“ And he reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks.”

THIS short account of St. Paul's public ministrations at Corinth, suggests much useful inquiry and meditation. And in order that we may successfully and profitably follow out its suggestion, we must first ascertain the precise meaning of the statement, that the Apostle reasoned with his hearers ; and then, what is implied in the assertion, that, as a consequence of this reasoning, he succeeded in persuading many from among them, both Jews and Greeks. The word which, in our text, is translated, “ he reasoned,” may signify simply the act of delivering a public oration or discourse. It generally, however, implies also, that a process of demonstration and an interchange of argument is carried on with respect to the subject to which the discourse relates ; and, with two exceptions only,



this meaning has, in our translation of the Bible, been assigned to the word wherever it occurs in The Acts of the Apostles. It is certain, moreover, that mere declamation would have been almost, if not altogether, useless in a Grecian city; and that, unless some clear and sound reasoning had been brought before their minds, St. Paul could hardly have prevailed on any Greeks to accept the Gospel, even if his earnest exhortations had succeeded with the Jews. We feel, therefore, justified in concluding, that St. Paul, throughout his public discourses in the synagogue at Corinth, addressed himself to the reason as well as to the feelings of his hearers; that there were arguments as well as assertions in the sermons he delivered, and that their persuasive efficacy may be attributed not only to the pathos and the power of his earnest exhortations, but also to the conclusive force of the reasoning he employed. And, with respect to the persuasion he wrought in many of the Jews and Greeks who attended on his ministry, the nature of the case makes it quite certain, that such persuasion was much more than an indolent assent as though to abstract or unimportant truths. The assumption of Christianity at Corinth, whether by a Jew or by a Greek, was no light and trivial act, but an act which affected every circumstance of the convert's life, and on which he would never think of venturing except at the bidding of a deep and strong conviction. The habits of his outward life must,

in consequence, have been completely changed ; his family connexions loosened, if not entirely dissolved ; his temporal condition and prospects seriously injured ; surely, then, a man in those days must have believed Christianity with his heart as well as with his intellect, and have been sustained, too, in such belief by the aid of a higher power than his own, before he would have ventured on an open confession of the truth.

We may receive our text, therefore, as asserting, first, that St. Paul appealed to reason in the discourses which he preached at Corinth, that he addressed himself to the judgment as well as to the feelings of those who listened to his message, that he endeavoured to convince the intellect as an efficient means whereby he might convert the heart ; and, secondly, that by so appealing to the reason, the Apostle was successful in producing in many minds a real and practical conviction of the truth of our religion, as well as of the necessity of living in accordance with such conviction, of abandoning whatever Christianity forbids, and of practising whatever it enjoins. These are the assertions of the text. The subjects which they unfold for our consideration are, first, the part which reason should fulfil in our religious inquiries ; and, secondly, the certainty that if this part be rightly fulfilled, the result will appear in a zealous and practical adherence to religious truth. And we hope to make such observations on these

subjects as will be useful in introducing an appeal to your bounty, in aid of the great work contemplated by the society, on whose behalf the Queen has issued the letter which has just been read <sup>1</sup>.

There is, undoubtedly, a part which reason should fulfil in our reception and entertainment of the truths of Christianity. This part has been misunderstood or disregarded, however, by large numbers of professed adherents to our faith. Some of these have brought reason forward in a position and character which it is incompetent to maintain. They have followed its guidance on a path into which it never should have entered; a path in which it is emphatically a blind guide; and so, as blind followers of this blind guide, its adherents on this path have too often fallen into an abyss, the abyss of doubt and unbelief. We shall hereafter state with precision the nature and extent of their erroneous proceeding, but at present we go on to observe, that others, alarmed at the consequences of paying too much deference to reason, have thrust it aside when it might have been an aid and an advantage in their course. They have taken as their first and chief maxim, that in religious matters reason should have no voice; and that from the outset to the close of the religious life, faith should be the only master of the soul. And we need

<sup>1</sup> Preached after reading the Queen's letter, on behalf of the National Society.

hardly say, that such a maxim leads inevitably to the most abject superstition, and that by whomsoever it may be adopted, this harsh tyrant of the spirit will either crush them as her victims, or chain them as her slaves. Now it is, of course, between these extreme opinions, belonging respectively to sceptical and superstitious minds, that earnest enquirers will find the true. There are certain duties in regard to religion which must be assigned to our reason for fulfilment ; but again, there are others to which it is as certainly incompetent, and which it should never be required, as it was never intended to fulfil. It may, and indeed it must, conduct us up to a certain point in our religious course ; but when that point is reached, reason, in all fairness, and by its own consent, must be abandoned. The torch which has led and lighted us so far, must be extinguished there, for afterwards its flame will only bewilder and mislead.

Our object now, is to set forth the precise limit to which reason may conduct us in religious matters, and beyond which its guidance is not safe. There are certain duties which it may, and certain others which it may not fulfil ; and these, respectively, it is our intention to point out. And first, it is evident that reason may judge whether or not we stand in need of a religion ; whether articles of religious truth, and ordinances of religious worship, can be of any advantage, or whether they possess any adaptation to beings like ourselves. Moreover,

if this question be settled in the affirmative, reason is competent to decide on the nature of the claims which any religion may have on our attention. It can give judgment on the credentials which that religion has put forth in proof of its having come from God. It can examine and estimate the evidence on which the religion may be based. This is a proceeding, to which not only is reason competent, but which reason can alone fulfil.—If a system of doctrine come to me in the character of a revelation from on high, it is my duty to ascertain its claims to that high distinction before I believe its disclosures or practise its commands; and in such an investigation my judgment only can be employed.—But further, it is also the duty of reason, when it has decided on our need of a religion, and on the Divine authority of that which we receive, to proceed in an enquiry as to the truths and injunctions which the religion has disclosed. Let us come now to the specific instance in which we are concerned. The reason has decided, suppose, that a religion such as Christianity is needed, and that the Gospel possesses and puts forth undeniable proofs that it has come from God; then reason must next inform us what truths Christianity teaches, and what maxims it enjoins. The Bible, like any other book, must be examined and perused, and the same faculties must be exercised in such employment which we should exert to discover the truths of history or of science. We must read that we may learn, we must investigate

that we may ascertain the verities of our religion; but throughout this perusal and research, reason must be employed, and employed alone, for imagination would be altogether out of place, and as yet faith has not received the articles of its belief. But when the disclosures of the religion have been ascertained, and faith has been furnished with the articles of its belief, the reason may be further employed in discovering, where they may be found, the beauties and the harmonies of the heaven-born truth. It may do this, but its path here should be one of modesty and caution, and it may never venture upon ground over which faith has placed a prohibition. These, then, are the duties of reason. It may ascertain our religious capabilities, and our need of a religion; it may estimate the evidence on which any particular religion rests; it may ascertain the truths and obligations which that religion unfolds; and then, in subservience and subordination to the faith which has now come into exercise, it may ascertain the perfections of the system which has been received; it may enchant the eye with the beauties of heavenly wisdom, and gladden the ear with the sweet and solemn melodies of immortal truth. But reason has no further work to do; its vocation does not reach beyond these bounds; with its own consent it should now pause, and submit in humility to faith. It has ascertained that certain doctrines come from God, that certain duties are enjoined by Him. This fact, we say, reason has ascertained

and proved. Well, then, it would be the strangest contradiction of its own conclusions, if reason should now presume to sit in judgment on these doctrines and these duties, and to stamp on them, according to the result of its examination, and as if with infallible decision, the characteristics of falsehood or of truth. It is in this very proceeding that the partisans of reason, to whom we have alluded, are chargeable with a most flagrant as well as fatal error. They have examined and approved the evidence which is set forth as the basis of their creed. In admitting the validity of this evidence, they have admitted their conviction that the creed has come from heaven, and that its articles are Divine; but after this conviction has been avowed, they again call in reason to weigh and to scrutinize this creed, receiving those of its articles which reason can, and rejecting those which it cannot approve; and acting thus, we say they act in direct contravention to the conclusions they had previously reached. For when it has been proved that the Bible is the work of inspired men, and when its contents have been accurately ascertained, surely the plainest dictates of our understanding teach us that there is nothing left but to receive these contents with the grateful, obedient, and submissive faith which befits those to whom God hath spoken in authority, and holiness, and love. They may include doctrines of profound and awful mystery; they may unfold scenes and circumstances which transcend the comprehension

of human minds, so that reason must confess itself baffled and overpowered in every contemplation. But the question is not, Does reason comprehend these high disclosures? but, Has reason ascertained that they have come from heaven? and if this latter question be answered in the affirmative, it matters comparatively little what answer the former may receive. We think this distinction is most clear and intelligible, and when once thoroughly understood, it brings the contest with infidelity into very narrow limits, and upon ground where it must inevitably fall. The great questions concerning Christianity, on which alone reason may pronounce its absolute decision, are, Does this system bear marks of having come from heaven, and if so, what are the doctrines and the duties it unfolds? Now the probability is, that if these questions be answered aright; if, that is, it be admitted that Christianity has come from heaven, and if there be a fair and full statement of its great disclosures, the probability then is, that since the universe visibly abounds in mysterious and unintelligible things, the Bible, too, will not be destitute of these; and that if the works of God are wonderful, and the thoughts of God, in nature and in providence, are very deep, so as to be unfathomable by the human mind, that then, also, the word of God must pass our understanding, and His doctrines and injunctions baffle often our strongest and wisest thoughts. This, we say, is probable. If in nature, which all



acknowledge to emanate from God, there be mysteries, then we may well expect that the revelation which, it has been proved, was given by His inspiration, will be mysterious too. But at all events, whether mysterious or not, reason has fulfilled its office when it has ascertained that the revelation has come from heaven, and when it has handed over the contents of the revelation to faith. It may direct us to the temple into which God hath summoned us, and where He hath declared He will meet those who draw nigh unto Him with their souls; it may guide us to the threshold of that sacred shrine, but beyond the threshold its guidance were impious and unsafe; faith must conduct us along the aisles, and lead us to the altars of the heavenly sanctuary; we must be governed by her directions when we have entered into the holy place, though reason may still move in subservience and submission by her side.

We have thus ascertained the part which reason may and should fulfil in the acts of religious meditation and belief. It was for the fulfilment of this part that St. Paul appealed to reason in addressing his audience at Corinth. He would call upon them to consider their need of such a religion as Christianity professed to be; to examine the evidence it put forth in proof that it had come from God; and then to ascertain the sense of the disclosures and injunctions it contained. Thus he reasoned with the people. But we are told that as a consequence of such reasoning, he persuaded many from among

them ; and this persuasion was strong and practical, since it led them in a course which required great sacrifice and self-denial. And we must show it to be in like manner invariably certain, that when the part of reason is rightly fulfilled, it will lead, as though of necessity, to a zealous and practical adoption of the truth. It must not however be forgotten how necessary to the right fulfilment of this part it is, that there be the continual exercise of candour as well as the possession of a sincere desire to ascertain what God hath spoken and enjoined. Now if he be conscious of such a spirit, the enquirer will at least never doubt that Christianity is adapted to our nature. This fact, at all events, he will not call in question. But if he then apply his reason to a consideration of the evidence which it presents, will he, necessarily, be persuaded that Christianity has come from God ? Our proposition depends upon the settlement of this question. And it is a question, in itself, of the very first importance. Our religion, our hopes for eternity are implicated in the answer it shall receive. We earnestly, therefore, ask for your serious attention while we give it a brief but fair consideration. Our religion is proved to be divine, if we can prove the authenticity of the documents in which it is contained. If the Old and New Testaments contain the record of facts which actually transpired, then Christianity has come from heaven, and man has been redeemed by God.

And the authority of the Old Testament is proved, if we can establish the authority of the New. The only question then which reason need at first entertain, in giving a fair consideration to the evidence of our religion, is, whether the New Testament is, or is not, an authentic memorial of facts? But if this question be candidly entertained, will reason necessarily acquiesce in the affirmative conclusion, and admit that the New Testament really is what it professes itself to be? We reply without hesitation that it necessarily will; and in proof of our reply, we first affirm, and the affirmation will not be disputed by any competent persons, that by every method of historical proof it has been conclusively established, that the Evangelists were living historians, and that they have written authentic history; that Christ actually lived upon earth, and said and performed the things which the Gospel narrative records. But this, it may be replied, is a general and vague assertion. We present you, then, with one specific line of proof, the force of which, we do think, cannot be withstood by any candid and earnest mind. We have said that Christianity is established, if it can be proved that the New Testament is an authentic memorial of facts. Now we may as truly assert that Christianity is established, if one only of the four Gospels can be proved to be a veritable record. This is evident; but then it can be satisfactorily proved, that one, at least, of the four Gospels was in exist-

ence and circulation within thirty years after the period to which its history relates; and it is impossible that a document not authentic could have gained credence, or even circulation, or that it could have been published so soon after the occurrence of the events which it professes to record <sup>2</sup>. Now we leave this consideration, with all its consequences, to settle in your minds, and we assert, without any anxiety or doubt, that reason, if this *one fact* alone be candidly and carefully regarded, must be persuaded that the Gospel is a record of actual facts, and that Christianity has come from heaven. Time forbids us to expand and extend, as we easily might, this portion of our subject, and we must, therefore, leave it to your private consideration. Nevertheless, in addition we may observe, that if St. Paul, preaching in the synagogue at Corinth, surrounded by subtle and licentious Greeks, by bigoted and malignant Jews, could, notwithstanding, by the cogency of the proofs he there brought forward, persuade many from among them, and convert them into meek and faithful converts to the doctrines of the Cross, surely we may regard this fact as a satisfactory demonstration, that the claims of the Gospel on our reception need only to be fairly and candidly examined, to produce at all times a like persuasion of its truth. Those Jews and Greeks were more competent than we are to

<sup>2</sup> Note F in Appendix.

detect its falsehood, if it had been false. Not thirty years had then elapsed since the death of Christ, the great fact on which St. Paul would lay the burden of his message. Surely, then, the very circumstance of the conversion and adherence of these Jews and Greeks may persuade us that a conviction like theirs may be demanded from ourselves. Let us, then, imitate those men of candid and truthful minds. Like them, let us examine the evidence on which our faith is founded, and the doctrines and the duties which it sets before us, and we shall assuredly be persuaded of its truth. Like the Greek, we shall then blush for the sophistry and sneers with which we may have once listened to the message of redemption, and we shall put away the sins in which we may have once rejoiced. Like the Jew, we shall relinquish the bigotry with which we may once have clung to ancient prejudice, and we shall come with meek affection to the Saviour, whom we may have once regarded with hatred or contempt. We shall do this, if reason perform its proper office, and we cherish the spirit which becomes earnest enquirers after truth, for then we shall, of necessity, attain to a persuasion which must govern every emotion of our hearts, and influence every habit and every maxim of our lives.

And now I desire to make a specific application of the entire subject of my discourse, in advocating the claims of the Society on whose behalf the Queen

has issued the letter you have this morning heard. This application will be exceedingly simple and direct. We have shown that there is a part which reason should fulfil in the work of religious meditation and belief. And if this be so, we may surely ask your aid in the great enterprise of national education ; for what is this but asking for your aid in the culture of the national reason, in improving and invigorating the understanding of our people, that it may perceive, and possess, and hold fast the truth ? We have shown, too, that if the part of reason be rightly fulfilled, the results will be manifest in a zealous and practical adherence to our religion. And if this be so, then, with much urgency, may we ask your aid in the great work of national Christian education. For what is this but asking for your aid to teach the national reason how it may rightly discharge its office ; to set before the understanding of our people the materials on which it should be employed, and thus to help it to attain the persuasion which is the necessary result of such employment ? This is the foundation of my appeal for the exercise of your Christian liberality. But in addition, permit me to remind you, that in giving help to this national Society, you are giving support and strength to our beloved Church. Of the many agencies which are employed in the service of our Church, this Society is among the most efficient in its important and extensive operations. Therefore I repeat, that in helping this Society you are

strengthening the Church, strengthening it **against** its misled or its malignant foes. And let **not** the assertion be attributed to bigoted adherence or to prejudiced antipathy, or to merely professional and party zeal, that in the security of the **Established** Church are implicated the permanence of our national institutions, and the prosperity of our father land. It is a settled conviction of the calmest and clearest minds, that the day, if ever it should come, which shall witness the downfall of the Church, will precede, but by a short interval, the downfall of the Constitution, and that on the same day we may tremble for the safety of the Throne. The mad and malignant spirit which may be permitted to loosen the political foundation of our faith, will loosen by the same effort the bonds of our whole social system, and relax the energies which have borne England so long in majesty and triumph above the nations of the earth. Whenever England's Church shall fall, we may write Ichabod, "the glory has departed," upon England's flag, and the powerful, because the pious, name of Britain shall no longer be a name of terror to the oppressor, and no longer of hope and consolation to the heathen and the slave. It rests on us of the present generation to avert so sad a change; but if ever that change, or worse than that, through our apathy and selfishness, should come; if, in future years, the traveller should pause to meditate on the site of this great city, amidst the ruins of

its former pride, he will find the columns of the cathedral and the palace crumbling together in heaps, which were piled in the same destruction, and he will thence conclude, yes, and note it to our shame, and to our confusion will it be written in the annals of our times, that England fell from its high estate, because the adherents of England's Church were false or feeble in their glorious charge; and that this country, once exalted above all others that ever existed upon earth, might have still been flourishing in greatness, if its national religion had not been betrayed or forsaken by its sons. We cannot, and need not, add more in our advocacy of the claims of the National Society, than that in contributing to its funds you are helping to avert calamities so grievous, by strengthening the Church, which, while it remains, will be the powerful guardian of our best interests, both in this world and in that which is to come.



## SERMON VI.

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PETER FOLLOWING CHRIST AFAR OFF.

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MATTHEW xxvi. 58.

“ But Peter followed him afar off unto the high priest’s palace, and went in and sat with the servants to see the end.”

THIS verse furnishes an illustration of a general remark, which holds good, we believe, of all the historical parts of Scripture. The remark is, that in relating a history or narrative, each of the inspired writers appears to be anxious rather about the instructiveness than about the completeness of his record ; or, in other words, that he is not so much an historian as a moralist, even when he is detailing facts. With, perhaps, one or two exceptions, we do not find in the Bible a consecutive and complete biography or narrative. The facts of which we are informed, are not brought before us in the order which a common historian would have naturally chosen ; many facts, too, are introduced which the mere history did not require, and many are omitted which we should deem necessary to its

completeness. But notwithstanding these blemishes as mere history, we can never complain of the inspired narratives as devoid of moral influence and practical instruction. They always impress valuable precepts on the heart, though they may not present a complete picture of events before the mind. And we need hardly observe, that this characteristic is perfectly accordant with their professed origin and design. The passage before us, as we have said, will illustrate this remark. In the preceding verse we are told, that they who had laid hold on Jesus led Him away to Caiaphas the high-priest. Now it might have been expected, that, according to the rules of common history, the Evangelist would give us all the details of this interesting period. The interval between our Lord's apprehension in the garden and His appearance in the palace of Caiaphas, was, surely, not destitute of all circumstances of interest. But they are passed by; and that part of the history in which we should have expected them to be detailed, abruptly tells us, that Peter followed his Lord afar off, and went in and sat with the servants to see the end. This incident, however, though it destroys the symmetry of the Evangelist's most touching narrative, is, perhaps, as instructive as any in the whole details of that interesting period. And though its introduction may affect the character of St. Matthew as a regular historian, we may recognise in it a proof that he bore a much higher

character, even that of a man who was inspired by the Holy Spirit to set before our minds those facts which we may find full of correction and reproof and instruction in righteousness, which may minister, as in the case before us, a wholesome warning, on which Christians of all ages may profitably dwell.

We now turn to as close an examination of the incident contained in the text, with a view to its subsequent application, as we may be enabled to give; and we earnestly ask that, with an effort of thought, you will follow us in our reflections. It appears, then, that St. Peter was one of three disciples whom our Lord selected to watch with Him in the garden. He knew that His enemies, with Judas at their head, were near at hand; and He might desire that these three friends should keep watch, so as to prevent any surprise or suddenness in His apprehension. But they discharged their duty but imperfectly. The fatigue and anxiety through which they had so lately passed, overcame them with sleep, till the emissaries of the chief priests and scribes and elders had arrived. When these, however, were present, and the three Apostles saw the danger with which their Master was threatened, the spirit of Peter, at least, seems to have revived, and in his ardent and angry zeal he smote and maimed one of the servants of the high-priest. This is the only incident which is mentioned as marking any active friendship on the

part of the Apostles towards the Lord during the whole of the trying scene ; and, shortly afterwards, we read, they openly forsook Him and fled. They forsook Him and fled, and our Lord was left alone in the hands of His fierce captors, who would not fail, we may be sure, to improve their opportunity of reviling and insulting one who was so much the object of their hate. He looked then, alas ! on no friendly countenance, and listened then to no consoling voice ; and a reproaching recollection that this was the case, visited the minds of Peter and of John as they were proceeding in their flight. The zeal and affection which Peter evinced in the garden, had not entirely passed away, and so he returned to follow the band of men who were leading our Lord to His place of trial. It was, however, only afar off that Peter watched and accompanied their progress. His conscience and his heart would not permit him to turn away, and leave his Master unheeded in such cruel hands. But fear, or shame, or want of faith, prevented his joining their company, and walking boldly and honestly by his Master's side. He attempted therefore the compromise which is represented in our text, and in the midst of these cruel circumstances he followed Christ afar off. His sense of duty, his feelings of affection, prevented him from continuing his flight ; they had power to cause him to turn and to follow his Lord, but they had not power to quicken his footsteps that he might reach the band of soldiers, and then

to prompt an open confession of affection and adherence to his Saviour even to the death. And thus, weak in purpose, and therefore wavering in act, he moved slowly on till he reached the palace of the high-priest. He might, even here, one thinks, have felt some shame at his cowardly and faithless conduct ; but if he did, it was overborne by stronger and less worthy feelings ; some purpose, even now, might rise within him of boldly avowing his belief that the despised criminal within was indeed the Messiah for whom the fathers looked ; but this purpose, if indulged, was soon put aside, and after lingering for some time at the door, he went in and sat down that he might see the end. But even now, if he had at all honestly yielded to the right feelings which, as we see, had existence in his breast, he would have gone aside and prayed that God would help him to make the confession of which he was ashamed. Alas, for the frailty of our nature ! The same weakness which had caused him to follow Christ afar off, took Peter into the worst company he could have chosen ; and it was with the servants of the high-priest that he sat down to see the end. He had partly regarded, and partly he had resisted, the remonstrances of his conscience ; and the result of this unhappy compromise was just what we might have looked for, it preceded an open and an entire renunciation of all the good purposes and feelings he had so imperfectly indulged. The irresolute and distant

steps with which he followed his Saviour, led him, as we might have expected, into association with his Saviour's foes. His feeble and partial fulfilment of the dictates of his conscience, was succeeded by an utter disregard of whatever it enjoined. We all know the sequel of the narrative. He followed Christ afar off, and then associated with those by whom Christ was hated and despised. But his sin did not terminate here ; it was consummated by his open and repeated disavowal of the Saviour, whom nevertheless he felt just before he could not entirely forsake, and to whom, not many hours previously, he had too confidently declared, that he would rather die than utter so guilty a denial. This denial was uttered, nevertheless, and thrice repeated too, before he was conscious of the depths into which Satan had conducted him ; and it is a sad, but a most instructive fact, that the man who was strong enough in principle to turn back from his cowardly and faithless flight, but who had not moral strength enough for an open and bold avowal of what he really felt, it is, we say, a sad but instructive fact, that this same man passed from his feeble and unholy compromise of principle into actual apostasy from the truth he had professed to hold most dear, and ended, by denying his Lord and Saviour, the unhappy course he had commenced by following Him afar off.

But we now turn from the narrative to its practical application, which, you will at once perceive,

is most obvious and direct. We have before us a man whose conscience and whose feelings will not permit him to abandon Christ, and who is yet prevented, by unworthy motives, from openly avowing his adherence to Christ's cause. We have such an one attempting a most fatal compromise, following his Saviour at a distance, and avoiding an open declaration of the attachment and belief which nevertheless he could not relinquish. But, brethren, do we misrepresent or exaggerate existing facts, when we say, that the great majority of professing Christians can be presented with no type more accurate, and no description more just, of their character and conduct, than is found in Peter, as he approached, with irresolute steps, the band of soldiers around his Lord, and in the language of the Evangelist, that "he followed Christ afar off?" We believe, rather, that the Holy Spirit who inspired St. Matthew to record this incident in Peter's life, did so expressly that the feeble believers, the compromising friends of truth, the Peters of future ages, might behold an accurate picture of their character, and might learn the certain consequences of their unhappy course. And this application of the incident is just as appropriate and as urgent now as at any period in the history of the Christian Church; for among the numbers, the vast numbers, even in this land, who profess and call themselves Christians, how many, how large a majority, are living in a state which cannot be better described

than as a perpetual compromise between conscience and convenience, between the maxims and fashions of the world, and the commands of God ! Brethren, we put the question plainly, Is this unmeaning and empty declamation, or is it the statement of a fact ? And, alas ! this vacillation has not been the peculiar sin of the present age only, but of every age since Christ's appearance upon earth. The professors of His religion have, we fear it, for the most part, been Peters, who have followed their Lord afar off, or surely Christianity had long ago been the sole religion of the world, and a Christian the highest character to which men would be anxious to aspire. But, looking to ourselves and to our own age, what characters, we ask, are more common than those whom conscience or habit will not permit to renounce Christianity altogether ; who hold professedly the articles of the Christian faith, and who practise, outwardly, the religious duties which are involved in that profession ; who are present at least once a week in the house of God ; who audibly, and, it may be, emphatically, repeat each sentence of the Creed, and never omit a loud Amen at the end of each one of the Church's prayers ; whose voices help to swell the psalmody of worship ; who listen with endurance, sometimes with attention, to the message of God's ministers, and who then move homewards with sedate countenance and measured step, as though in solemn recollection of all the acts in



which they have been engaged—who do all this—and this is well ; we may thank God for the grace which is manifested even by these acts ; but, alas ! this is all they do. The persons of whom we speak give no further evidence that they are followers of Christ ; and when this is the case, we must tell them plainly, they may be following Him, but then, like Peter, it is afar off. It is afar off ; for we never see them at the Holy Communion ; they desire not such close intercourse with Christ, if with outward decorum and decency it may be shunned ; and the interval between themselves and their Saviour, which, like Peter, they deem so safe, would, they imagine, be dangerously shortened, if they found themselves obeying the command, “Do this in remembrance of me.” The Church bell often sounds in their ears an invitation to weekly prayer ; but they come not, for this again would be approaching too near to Christ. We observe nothing either of self-denial in their daily life. There is nothing in their language, and nothing in their acts, which betokens separation from the world, or an endeavour to perfect holiness in the fear of God. They halt between two opinions, and observing them, we might now conclude that they regard Jehovah, and *now*, that they regard Baal as the Lord. And acting thus, not only does their conduct resemble that of Peter, but most frequently their reasons for it are identical with those which may be assigned as his. For, think you, if

Christ had walked unguarded and alone to the palace of the high-priest, if He had not been surrounded by a band of foes, think you that then Peter would not have quickened his footsteps and soon have gained his Master's side, and walked with Him in *close*, because he would then have deemed it safe, companionship to the scene of trial? What was it, then, but fear, or shame, or doubt, in some insidious form, which kept him afar off from Christ? He might dread some violence or insult from the soldiers, or deem himself dishonoured if found in association with a prisoner, though one whom His enemies acknowledged to have committed no crime; or doubt may have visited his mind as to whether, indeed, Christ were the Son of God, since he now saw Him so completely in the power of man. Some one of these thoughts and feelings, or perhaps all of them combined, formed the reason of his irresolute and distant steps; and we need hardly say, that it is precisely in the same manner that we may account for the compromises and the undecisiveness of the persons to whom we have referred. They fear lest close adherence to Christ, earnestness of Christian profession, strict consistency of Christian practice, may expose them to the censure of the world, to the sneer, or to the frown, or at least to the concealed enmity of men. They are ashamed of bearing the reproach of Christ. They will not consent to appear in the character of fools, that they may become divinely wise, nor in

that of the weak, that they may be endued with heavenly strength. The world chooses to regard piety as the mark of a feeble understanding, or as indicative of hypocrisy and craft; and they cannot bear that such characteristics should be attributed to them; and then unbelief comes in to corroborate these feelings, and to strengthen their ascendancy. There are doubts suggested, as to whether, indeed, Christ Jesus is the Lord; whether, indeed, His doctrines and precepts have come from heaven; whether, in short, the Bible may not be false, immortality and responsibility a vain imagination, and hell a fable and Heaven a dream. If inconsistent and compromising Christians were, indeed, honest with themselves, and candidly examined their own feelings with regard to the religion they profess, they would, however shocked by the discovery, undoubtedly discover some such doubts as these present, where they did not at all suspect their existence; and a secret infidelity, combined with a dread of human censure and with shame at bearing what the world deems a reproach, would often complete their resemblance, both in conduct and in motive, to the Apostle Peter, when, instead of going forward, declaring that he was Christ's disciple, and claiming to walk by his Master's side, he hung back in fear and shame, and only followed Him afar off.

But there is another, and a most instructive application of the narrative before us. Peter went

into the palace of the high-priest, and sat down with the servants to see the end. If he had walked closely and boldly with his Master to the scene of trial, this would not have been the case, he would then have escaped the temptation by which he was subsequently overpowered; but his timid and distant steps took him at once into a scene of danger. The weakness and irresolution to which he had at first yielded, continued to increase; and instead of going apart, and making new efforts in God's strength, he relaxed yet more and more in the moral struggle, till we find him in the worst scene and society he could have chosen in that hour. He might be quite sure, that from the servants of the high-priest he would hear nothing but thoughtless, and idle, and insulting language concerning his blessed Master. Nevertheless, he went in and sat with them, that he might see the end. Yes, brethren, and as he sat there, having first followed Christ afar off, and then joined himself to those by whom Christ was disregarded or reviled, he may be contemplated as an accurate type of the professing Christians of all ages, whose compromise of religious principle is always accompanied or succeeded by thorough worldliness of practice; whose timid and distant following of Christ has, for its necessary result, an intercourse with those men and a fulfilment of those maxims which Christ utterly condemns. We say this is the necessary result of a timid and distant following of Christ; for unless the

heart, the understanding, the will be entirely submitted to Him, there must be conformity with the usages and the maxims of the world. "He that is not with me is against me." This is our Lord's own language, and it contains the expression of an obvious and most certain truth. There is continually, on the one side, exerted on us the influence of the world, exerted in its fascinations or its frowns; and, on the other, the influence of religion is at work. Now we cannot abide in partial subjection only, to either of these influences; the one or the other must have ascendancy over our moral nature; they cannot both be habitually supreme. If it be our will that the influence of Christianity shall be ascendant, then, in that case, we must not be distant, but close followers of Christ; and this closeness of association must not be occasional, but uniform and constant. We must be close to Him in our meditations, close to Him in prayer, close to Him in the ordinances of His Church, close to Him in strict obedience to His commands, close to Him in patient endurance of His reproach, close by continually dwelling on His character, and by striving after perfect conformity to it in every feature. If, in any of these particulars, we are afar off from Him, then the measure of our distance from His side is the measure of our approach to scenes which He disapproves. The duty of prayer may be neglected, or fulfilled only with coldness or formality. Let the reason of this be ascertained, and it will be

found to result from giddy restlessness, or from sinful anxiety, or from vain ambition: it is the world which has deprived us of all time or taste for the devotional exercises of pious faith. There may be disregard of some ordinance of the Church, which we were accustomed to observe; we may not be so frequent in our attendance at the administration of the Eucharist, or on the ordinary service of the house of God. The time and thought, be assured, which is thus taken from our religious duties, is given to some trifling or sinful occupation. And if in any other particular, in our meditations, or our feelings, or our acts, we fail to maintain closeness of association with our Lord, it is most certain we shall give the time, and thought, and obedience, which He may rightly claim, we shall give them to the world and to the service of His foes. O let us never forget, that unless we keep close to Christ,—and the phrase, let it be observed, has a deep and sober meaning, it is not the language of enthusiasm, it is not the utterance of vain and visionary thought,—unless we keep close to Christ, we shall certainly go where Peter went, and be found with the servants of the high-priest; unless there be always an intimate union and a strict obedience to our Saviour and our Lord, we shall certainly go over to His enemies, to sympathize with feelings and to share in practices which He utterly condemns!

Nor, let it be observed, does the parallel we

have established between the course of Peter and that of a compromising Christian, cease to hold good at this point. Most frequently, rather, is it maintained to the close; and after approaching and conforming to the world, such Christians will end by denying, if not by word, yet practically denying their Lord. They may not, with the fallen Apostle, affirm, with an oath, that they know not the man; they may not, like him, blaspheme in their apostasy; their renunciation of the Saviour may not, like his, be explicit, and public, and profane: nevertheless, though this may not be the case, the probability is great, that they will deny the Lord whom first they followed afar off, and with whose enemies they have subsequently held familiar intercourse. For indeed it is always true, that in the permission, and much more in the practice, of whatever the world enjoins but Christ disallows, there is a denial of Him. We wish however, now, rather to impress upon your minds the fact, that such permission and such practice, in most instances, lead downward to something worse; that their direct tendency is to loosen the hold of moral principle, to relax the energy of religious health, so as at length to leave him who is guilty of them in utter helplessness, and exposed to every temptation. And who can conjecture what advantage Satan may gain over him in that state? The society which he frequents, indulges sometimes, it may be, in irreverent or profane allusion to the Gospel. Is it certain that the man

who now can listen to, will not hereafter join in these? Such allusions may become more frequent and more bold; sometimes, perhaps, there is heard the expression of a doubt, sometimes of positive disbelief; but if the distant follower of Christ has shared in the follies, nay, occasionally in the vices of the society where such utterances are permitted, and if in doing so, he has weakened the tone of his religious health and loosened the bonds of every sacred restraint, is it not possible, or may we not say probable, that no long period will elapse before he, too, will be ready to utter his applauding shout at the profane jests of infidelity, or even to echo with an increased emphasis the sceptic's doubt, and mutter with an added bitterness the scoffer's sneer? Yes, even this may happen, and has often happened to those whose religion consisted at the first in following Christ afar off. They have taken the course of Peter, and they continue in it to its unhappy close.

But we read, that after all his sin, "the Lord turned and looked upon Peter." And the fallen Apostle did not move aside to avoid that look, nor did he strive to withstand its influence with a stubborn and unrepenting heart; but "he remembered the word of the Lord," and then went out and bewailed his sin. From human eyes there never dropped more bitter tears, than when, on that occasion, Peter wept. And it was not a transient emotion which those tears expressed; for,



after all, he was recognised by his Lord as a chosen and beloved Apostle, and having thrice repeated that he loved, as he had thrice denied Him, he was commanded and commissioned to feed his Master's sheep. In his own language, he went astray, but soon returned to the Great Shepherd and Bishop of his soul. It is, brethren, with an earnest desire that you, who, resembling him, have followed Christ afar off, and who have realised the sad consequences of this procedure, may imitate his repentance too, and henceforth walk, as he subsequently did, in closeness to the Saviour, in sobriety and hope, "as obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to former lusts<sup>1</sup>," but in holiness as Christ is holy: it is, we say, with an earnest desire that you will, henceforth, follow this his example, and these his maxims, that we have brought forward this portion of his history for your consideration. Do not permit it, we beseech you, to pass hastily from your minds. Think of your present spiritual condition, and candidly ask yourselves whether you are walking close to or afar off from Christ. Ask yourselves, if Christ appeared now, in this place, how He would look on you, what expression of countenance He would assume, of affection or of reproach? Ask yourselves this, and do not let the question pass away until it is fairly answered; and if you have imitated Peter in

<sup>1</sup> 1 Pet. i. 14.

following Christ afar off, in sitting down with the servants of the high-priest, in then denying even that you know the man, imitate him, too, in his contrition. Restrain not, and be not ashamed of even tears like his ; for those tears God Himself will wipe away, when He welcomes you into everlasting joy.

## SERMON VII.

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### SCRIPTURE DIFFICULTIES.

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#### HABAKKUK ii. 1.

“ I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reproved.”

THESE words express the prophet's intention to wait for an answer to certain inquiries and complaints which he had laid before God. He felt considerable anxiety respecting the matters to which these inquiries and complaints referred ; and so he determined to put himself in the position of a watcher, and to wait with patience and vigilance for whatever information respecting them God might be pleased to send. His language indicates the possibility that this information, from some cause or other, might escape him. But he knew it was far too valuable to be lost, and so he decided on sparing no pains by which it might be secured.

It is not, however, our intention to dwell now specifically on this resolution of the prophet. We

have brought it forward, because, occurring prominently in the service of the day, it appears to suggest the consideration of a great subject which we gladly embrace this opportunity of bringing before your minds. The subject is, Scripture difficulties, and the reasons of their existence. In acquainting ourselves with Divine revelation now, it is not less necessary for us than it was for Habakkuk, to watch that we may see what God says unto us,—to take pains, that we may ascertain what we are to reply to His enemies when we are reprov'd. The subject, therefore, which we have announced, appears to be fairly brought before us in the words of our text; and, if we now ask for your special and serious attention to the observations respecting it which we are about to offer, it is because, in the first place, they will relate to a subject which is commonly avoided, and passed by with a timid or a thoughtless disregard; and because, in the second place, we have a strong hope that, if duly pondered, our remarks may, with the blessing of God, be the means of removing difficulties respecting this subject under which thoughtful minds may have often laboured.

The Scripture difficulties of which we are about to speak, are not those which are occasioned by the mysteriousness of any Divine announcement or disclosure. In other words, they are not those abstract difficulties of which we are conscious, when we meet with any doctrine which is unintelligible

to our minds, or with any proceeding which appears inconsistent with the attributes of God. Those difficulties, in short, with which we are now concerned, do not relate to the matter, but to the mode of revelation; not to the information of the Bible, but to the language and style in which it is conveyed. And these, it must be confessed, are, to the majority of men, seriously obscure; so that with reference to the greater part of sacred Scripture, in our times, with our language and our habits of thought, it is certainly not true, that "he who runs can read." We have said that this is the case with reference to the greater part of Scripture. But we ought thankfully to add, that if the larger, it is the least important part; and that those inspired pages which display the fundamental doctrines of Christianity, and which specifically relate to the salvation of human souls, are intelligible at a glance to the feeblest understanding. Whatever assertions, therefore, we may advance with respect to the obscurities of Scripture, do not, let it be observed, apply to those portions in which we are taught, as sinners, how the pardon of our sins may be obtained; or, as degraded and defiled, how The blessed Spirit will clothe us in that holiness in which we may behold the Lord. The information given us on these subjects is as plainly given as we could desire. But then the Bible contains a vast amount of information and instruction, besides that which immediately relates

to the subject of our redemption. It has pages of history relating the chief events which befel the Church of God during more than three thousand years; and pages of prophecy in which the future prospects of Christianity are shadowed forth. It has precepts for our guidance in the ordinary paths of life, and profitable meditations on the condition and pursuits of men, and prayers and hymns of piety in which we may fittingly worship God. And all this information and instruction, we are expressly told, was written for our learning, was expressly designed to help our moral and religious advancement, so that as men of God we might be thoroughly furnished unto all good works. And now we are brought in front of the difficulties of which we desire to speak. For, as matter of fact, in our case, a considerable part of this information and instruction is absolutely inaccessible, except to those who employ pains and diligence in reaching it, who search for it as for hidden treasure, and to whom the gain thereof is greater than that of fine gold. This is necessarily the case from the very mode in which it is presented to our minds. We do not perceive it as it was first revealed, but only through the defective medium of a translation. Moreover, it was written originally by men whose temperament and whose habits of life were perfectly different from ours, and these circumstances have caused it to be presented to us in a style which

often appears unnatural and forced. Its authors have often, too, introduced numberless allusions and illustrations which we cannot easily understand. Then again, the political history, and the civil condition of the nation to which the writers belonged, and which would naturally affect compositions designed for that nation's use, are in many portions covered with an obscurity we cannot pierce. If to all this we add the fact, that since the time when our translation of the Scriptures was made, many words, then in common use, have become obsolete, or have changed their meaning, we shall perceive at once, that if human agencies alone are to be employed in promulgating the word of inspiration, the necessary consequence must be, that very obscurity on the face of our English Bible of which every intelligent reader must be conscious. Even a pious and an intelligent and careful reader of the Bible must, we say, be conscious of the obscurity we have described, and will continually meet with phrases, and metaphors, and allusions, which he must take pains if he would understand. But, if this be the case with pious and intelligent and careful readers, what will happen in the case of those who are not pious, and who, if intelligent, are not careful to bring their intelligence to bear upon God's word? I do not wish unfairly to presume on the position in which I stand, but, let me ask to how many persons in this congregation

was the first lesson of this morning's service perfectly intelligible ' ? or should I err, if I were to say, that in the case of the majority of those present, many of its verses passed successively across their ears as sounds to which positively no meaning was annexed. Or, to take another instance. Have we all fully and accurately acquainted ourselves with the language of the Psalms, beautiful and expressive, as it undoubtedly is, from the beginning to the end ? Or, in repeating this in the ordinary service of the Church, are we not, often, literally speaking in an unknown tongue, and permitting expressions to pass across our lips which have no meanings corresponding to them passing through our minds ? We may have erred, brethren, in attributing such a want of intelligence and apprehension to the majority of those who are present in this place ; and if so, we desire to experience and express a sincere regret ; but our inquiries were suggested by two facts which certainly cannot be denied ; the first being, that to understand the entire Bible, earnest piety and thoughtful application are absolutely requisite ; and the second, that the majority of men are not earnestly pious, and are not accustomed to give a thoughtful application to whatever may concern the well-being of their souls. Our general inference, however, is certain, though it may not apply, as we ventured to suppose, to the congregation assembled in this place,

<sup>1</sup> The Chapter from which the text is taken.



that, to the majority of those who possess it, the Bible is for the most part, and through the causes we have named, a sealed book, and that there are hundreds of pages within it from which not a beam of heavenly light has ever shone upon their souls.

Now this fact, we believe, is frequently the cause of much difficulty and distress to thoughtful minds. They cannot avoid deeming it strange, that, since God has been pleased to give spiritual instruction to His creatures, much of it should have been given in such a form, that it is not readily available; nay, in many cases, in which it is not available at all, without the expenditure of much time and thought. We repeat, that this is commonly looked upon as a serious difficulty; and it is one which is seldom fairly met, and intelligently considered. We do not presume to say that the remarks we are about to offer, and very many more might be adduced, will, at once, in every case remove this difficulty; and yet, we are convinced that they will effect its diminution, and that the more carefully they are pondered the less important will the difficulty appear. We say then, in the first place, that these obscurities of Scripture furnish often the very best internal evidence we can have of the authenticity of the inspired statements. It is well known, that there are many phrases and metaphors and allusions in the Bible, which for a long period were quite unintelligible, and continued

so, till a new discovery by an eastern traveller, or by a student of languages or history, furnished the required clue, and threw light upon what had previously been, emphatically, a dark saying. And this newly discovered fact, whatever it might be, by which the dark saying was made luminous, could be proved to belong to the very age and place in which the obscure passage in question professedly appeared. The case is precisely this. A message, which professes to have been delivered in a remote period and place, has come to us ; and it contains sentences and paragraphs which we could not decypher. But, the torch of learning carried by a strong hand through the shadows of antiquity, reaches that same epoch and locality which stands at the heading of the message ; and there its light falls upon the very key which alone can unlock the treasures of the communication, of whose meaning, unless it had been thus disclosed, we could not have been thoroughly possessed. This illustration is not fanciful or at all inaccurate ; it represents what has actually and frequently transpired. If this were an appropriate time and place, we could bring forth numerous instances in point <sup>1</sup>. But when these instances occur, what is the necessary inference ? Surely it can be nothing else than this, that the obscure statements now cleared up, belong in fact to the very period and place in which

<sup>1</sup> Note G in Appendix.

they claim their origin, and that, to say the least, the probability is great that they were written by the very men who are professedly their authors. We are thus led by a direct path to an intelligent conviction, that the Bible is a record of facts which actually transpired ; and attaining this conviction, we have placed our feet upon a rock, from which we can never be moved by either sophistry or sneers ; so that, with no exaggeration we may affirm, that in many cases, the very obscurities of Scripture have been made instrumental in leading to the clearest knowledge, and most intelligent belief ; the dark sayings of the Bible have been as lights to guide us to that sure foundation, on which we may abide unmoved until faith is changed to sight.

This use of Scripture difficulties as an evidence of revelation, is exceedingly important, and indeed can only be fairly valued by those who have had occasion to employ them in this character. It constitutes, then, the first ground on which we vindicate their existence. But besides this use, they have a second, of still more importance, and which is experienced, not as in the first case, by a limited class, by those who doubt and by those who defend the Scriptures, but by all those in whose possession the Scriptures may be found ; for these difficulties form the very best means that could be devised to test and strengthen our attachment to the word of God. They test our attachment ; they make it clearly manifest, whether there is or is not, any

anxiety in a man's mind to learn the Divine will ; whether or not, like David, he loves the Divine commandments above fine gold, and regards the testimony of the Lord as the very rejoicing of his heart. If there be in him such an affection for sacred truths, then this reader of the Bible will never permit an obscure verse or chapter to pass by, until he has ascertained its real meaning ; like the prophet, he will watch until he has learned what God has spoken. There is instruction, he will say, hidden beneath these words, strange and unintelligible as they now seem ; and this instruction has been given from heaven for my advancement in heavenly wisdom ; then I may not put this difficulty aside, nor remain satisfied until I obtain for it the best explanation I can find. On the other hand, where there is no affection for Divine truth, the words of Scripture will be read without any anxiety to ascertain their sense, and chapters and verses may meet the eye and ear, but will effect no entrance into the mind or heart. And so, we wish you particularly to observe, we are thus furnished with a criterion by which our spiritual state may be decided. As professing Christians, the Bible is in our possession, and by us it is often read and heard ; and the question is, Do we listen to and peruse its pages with indifference ? If difficulties occur, as to the most intelligent they continually must, are they put aside, and is the consideration of them deferred to a more convenient season ?

Or, worse than this, do we consider them as idle sounds, which have not, as they seem not to have, any meaning, or none with which we can be concerned? If this be so, then we may be quite certain that the advancement of our souls in heavenly wisdom is not our chief concern; but if not, then, brethren, it is much more than questionable whether we have yet learnt the earliest lessons of that wisdom, or in plainer words, whether we have yet taken the first step in the narrow and toilsome path which leadeth unto life.

But the difficulties of Scripture not only test, they strengthen an attachment to the Divine word. It is a property of all knowledge which is of difficult acquisition, that in the very act of acquiring it, it strengthens the faculties of the mind; and moreover, such knowledge, when acquired, is always rejoiced in with the joy of one "who findeth great spoil." Every student of science knows the worth of that invigorating discipline through which he passes in his efforts to reach and grasp an abstract truth, and that feeling, almost extatic, which is experienced when he can really call that truth his own. But precisely parallel and similar to this is the course and the consciousness of one who is intent on an explanation of Scripture difficulties, and to whose apprehension, at length, these difficulties are made clear. The very intentness of his mind, when he meditates on any particular portion of Divine truth, causes such meditations to become more familiar,

and to be carried on with more facility and with more freedom from other thoughts. Moreover, when the truth after which he has been searching is actually perceived, it appears with a vividness and an individuality which, under other circumstances, it would not have possessed; the darkness, so to speak, with which it was surrounded, makes the light of this truth more palpable and more distinct. Thus, in a twofold manner, are the difficulties of Scripture eminently adapted to strengthen the attachment of those who already love God's word: they exercise so as to invigorate the faculties which are employed in a meditation on Divine truth, and they have the effect of bringing its heavenly principles with unwonted power and perspicuity before the mind. If the Bible were presented to us, written throughout in the plainest language, so that of every page it might be said, that "he who runs can read," these benefits would not have been secured, and then, facts and principles, which on account of the very difficulties through which they have been reached, are now impressed distinctly upon the mind and upon the heart, would have been passed by with comparatively little thought. And on the same supposition, we should not possess the valuable tests with which those difficulties furnish us; nor, again, that evidence for the authenticity of the Scripture statements, which in many an instance has been the means of demonstrating to the sceptic's mind the great truth, that the Bible

has come from God. We vindicate, then, on these three grounds, the existence of Scripture difficulties, and unhesitatingly affirm, that they should excite within us gratitude and not complaint. They are not, we may be assured, the accidental and unforeseen consequences of the employment of human agencies in the transmission of the Bible, but stand where they stand, as parts of that merciful discipline through which we are passing upon earth. They are not merely permitted, we say that they are designed by God, designed to lead inquirers to an intelligent conviction that He has sent a message to mankind; and they are designed also to prove and to invigorate the Christian piety which has long reposed upon that great and glorious truth.

But we may not turn from this hasty treatment of a subject which would require, indeed, hours for its full development, without making it further available to our practical advantage. It is our office, in this place, to resolve, if we can, religious difficulties which are universally experienced, but much more is it our office to urge religious truths on which you are all agreed, so that they may have a practical influence on your hearts and on your lives. Then let us dwell for a while on the great fact which we all admit, and which has been assumed throughout,—that the Bible contains the word of God. Our presence this morning in this place, and our reverent silence while that holy book was read, have announced our conviction of this

truth. But wherefore has that word been uttered? Wherefore, in times past, did God speak to our fathers by the prophets, and wherefore did His Spirit guide our fathers' hearts to transmit, uninjured, His utterance unto us? He strengthened many of them to suffer and to die, rather than we should lose this rich inheritance; and the heavenly volume now in our possession has been carried in safety through more than seventeen hundred years, because His guardianship was over and around it. But wherefore all these provisions that we might read these pages in their integrity? Is it that we may learn from Moses, how God in the beginning evoked creation into life, or how He guided His Church through the wilderness for forty years? Or is it that we may catch strains of pious melody from David, or be rapt into prophetic vision with Isaiah, or kindle at the heroism of Daniel and Saint Paul? Or is it that we may learn maxims of worldly prudence from Solomon, or that we may thoughtfully echo his meditations on the vexation and the vanity of everything for which men labour, and which they love? Is it for these purposes that the Bible is put in our possession, and that we are bidden to peruse it? We may say that it is, and that it is not. It is not, if we rest in these purposes and look no further: but it is, if Moses, and Daniel, and Isaiah, and Saint Paul lead us on to Jesus Christ, and if we discern the indications they everywhere give us, that this is the great subject-



matter of the entire record, that “God hath given to us eternal life, and that this life is in His Son.” The Bible is, indeed, sent to make us wise, but then, chiefly “wise unto salvation :” and all its other wisdom, unless it teach us also this, itself assures us will be of no avail. And let me enforce all these remarks, by reminding you that we are told of no Bible in either of the two future worlds. There is none needed in heaven, because heaven is filled by those whose faith is changed for sight,—and there can be none, remember this, there can be none in hell, because the Bible is emphatically a message of salvation, and no salvation will be offered to those who have once been numbered among the lost. But what a motive to make the best use, while we have it, of this sacred book ; and how earnestly should we, therefore, pray, that He “who hath caused all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning,” would “grant that we may in such wise hear them, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest them, that by patience,” amidst the difficulties they present, and by a right use of the blessed comforts they unfold, “we may embrace and ever hold fast, that blessed hope of everlasting life, which He has given us in Jesus Christ our Lord.”

## SERMON VIII.

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### THE EXISTENCE AND EMPLOYMENTS OF ANGELS.

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PSALM ciii. 20.

“Bless the Lord, ye his Angels that excel in strength; that do His commandments, hearkening unto the voice of His word.”

THE name by which this day is commonly known is derived, as you are perhaps aware, from the religious service, for the commemoration of which it is appointed by the Church. We celebrate on this day, the Feast of Saint Michael and all Angels; and the fact that a special mass was solemnized at this period by the Romish Church, to celebrate the piety and prowess of the great Archangel, has furnished the term Michaelmas, which is, perhaps, generally associated in our minds with only secular ideas. It has, however, you perceive, a religious origin; it is, in fact, a religious appellation, and we therefore gladly embrace the opportunity which this year furnishes, of endeavouring to redeem the day from its purely secular associations, and of bringing before your minds the great facts and truths which it was

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appointed to suggest. We can never mingle too much religion with our every-day and ordinary thoughts, nor infuse too much of its influence throughout our secular concerns; and therefore, with the blessing of God, this period of the year, which is suggestive for the most part of merely worldly and transient interests, we shall now endeavour to connect with those high and elevating thoughts which are furnished by a contemplation of the angelic hosts, and with those strong motives to religious effort and obedience which such meditations will urgently set forth.

The existence and employment of angels will constitute, then, the subject of our discourse: but in considering this subject, we wish it to be observed, that it is not our intention to move at all on speculative ground; whatever is not plainly revealed in Scripture, will furnish no part of our discourse. We shall therefore keep clear of the subject of angelic guardianship. It is true there are many passages in the Bible which seem to favour the doctrine, that every believer is attended by the ministrations of a heavenly being, to whom charge is given respecting him, who holds him up so that he may not stumble or fall in his daily paths, and our Church, in the collect of this day, appears to give its sanction to such belief. We are there taught to pray, that "as the holy angels always do God service in heaven, so by his appointment they may succour and defend us on earth." Never-

theless, this doctrine of angelic guardianship does not seem to be numbered among those revealed things which emphatically belong unto us; it is not plainly and explicitly set forth in any part of Scripture. It may be true, however, and yet, if true, it does not appear to furnish a lesson of much practical and profitable worth<sup>1</sup>. We shall, therefore, as we have said, keep clear of this subject, and confine ourselves to those facts which are plainly revealed, and which are prominently brought before our view this day,—to the facts of the existence of angels, and of their pious occupations; and from these facts we shall endeavour to deduce certain practical inferences, on which at this, and indeed at all times, we may, each of us, profitably dwell.

We commence by observing, that before receiving any information from Scripture, we might naturally infer the existence of beings superior to ourselves, though inferior to God. Indeed, a belief in such existences was held before Christianity was published, and has been discovered where Christianity is unknown. It naturally arises from an intelligent contemplation of the Universe around us, when such contemplation is connected with just notions of the Infinite Creator. For between the lowest species of animal existence, and man in his most perfect form, we find a regular and progressive development of life, of bodily and mental life, so that as we pass

<sup>1</sup> See a Sermon by Bishop Horsley, on Daniel iv. 17.

from one extreme to the other, we move in a gradually ascending scale, and find at each successive step, some new endowment, some new faculty, or susceptibility, or power. And so, when we reach the most perfect of all earthly creatures; when we come to man in his completest form, with dignity of person, and expansiveness of feeling, and power of thought, and, above all, with piety of spirit; when we come to such an one as this, we may naturally pause and ask, but may not the power of an Infinite Creator go even further still? This man is indeed gloriously endowed, but may not God confer other and higher endowments than even these? May He not fashion a body of even more beauty and symmetry and strength, and place it beyond the liability to decay, and make it a more fitting and obedient instrument of the soul? Nay, is it not possible that He may create some spirits who are altogether free from the encumbrance of a body, and who are permitted to expatiate and exert their powers without any such limitations as are imposed upon ourselves? And then, for the spirit itself;—that which exists in the man on whom we look is indeed glorious; glorious in thought, in feeling, in desire; above all, glorious in its holiness: but may there not be others which can contain more knowledge, and think with more wisdom, and feel with deeper emotion, and be more loving and holy and devout? Does the productive will and power of the Creator stop short at

man, and is the wide interval between the most perfect of our fellow-creatures and Himself, is this interval not filled up by beings of yet more and more magnificent endowments, so that in wisdom, and holiness, and power, they advance closer and more close to the infinite Perfection? In a word, are there no creatures in the universe beneath whom man is placed a little lower in the scale of being? Are there no angels and archangels, no cherubim and seraphim, who occupy positions that continually rise in loftiness till they come close to the footstool of the Eternal Throne? These, let it be observed, are questions which our reason may naturally propose. And it is most interesting to observe, how with these natural conjectures the information of the Bible accurately corresponds. For it clearly informs us of the existence of hosts of beings who are in all respects more excellent than ourselves; beings who are older than the world in which we live, and who have been acquiring wisdom and holiness throughout the ages of their immortal life. No disease invades or distresses their existence; there is no sorrow in their lofty path, and it is bounded by no grave. For life, glorious, immortal, unbroken life, has been conferred on them by God. We learn all this, and more, from express declarations of the Bible. They exist in innumerable multitudes, for "the chariots of God," says David, "are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels." It is said, too, that He

hath made "his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire<sup>3</sup>." And the inspired accounts of their appearance and achievements plainly indicate that they are of surpassing glory and might. In the words of our text, "they excel in strength." We know, too, that they are of holiness unspotted, because they continually behold the Lord. And then, think of the knowledge which must be acquired by such strong faculties as theirs, and from such materials as are open to their view. The intuition of a moment might teach them more than all the students of human science could acquire in years, for they pass to and fro amidst the inner movements of creation, and inspect, we may say, the mechanism of the works of God. The records of all history are open for their perusal, and they may visit and examine every region of the universe, which is their home. And think, too, of the sagacity which has derived its maxims from such observation and experience as theirs. How consummate and profound must be the wisdom which has been gathering its treasures since the first day of their existence. We say nothing of their outward form, and aspect, and condition. They may, or they may not, present a visible appearance like our own.

<sup>3</sup> It is proper to mention, that of this passage there is another translation, which is supported by many excellent commentators. "Who maketh the winds his messengers, and the lightnings his servants."

they may, or they may not, perform their occupations with instrumentalities like ours ; they may, or they may not, chaunt their hymns in tones like those of human melody, and dwell in palaces of dazzling splendour, and rejoice in visible and audible delights : of these things we say nothing, because nothing has been explicitly and circumstantially revealed. In those manifestations of these beings of which we are informed, the aspect under which they have appeared may have been temporary, for the purpose of the occasion, or it may be permanent : of this we cannot tell. And the accounts of their condition in heaven may be literally, or they may be only metaphorically true : of this also we cannot tell. But we do clearly learn that their existence is glorious and exalted beyond our highest thoughts, and that their endowments are of the loftiest order ; so that if the most perfect man that ever lived, if Adam, suppose, in all the excellence of that unfallen nature over which these angels rejoiced as being very good, had been placed in comparison with one of them, we must confess that even he would have been lower than the lowest of them all. Then imagine the disparity which must exist between the most humble of those glorious creatures, and the noblest and wisest and holiest among the fallen sons of Adam, who are now existing with us upon the earth.

And now with the notions we have thus gathered of their existence and endowments, let us pass on



to consider their occupations. We cannot better describe them than by repeating the words of the Psalmist, that these creatures, excellent as they are in strength, continually do the commandments of the Lord, hearkening to the voice of His word. The expression remarkably accords with the petition which our Lord inserted in His prayer: "that the will of God may be done on earth even as it is done in heaven." In the language of Hooker, "Such observants are the angels of that law which the Highest hath imposed upon them, that our Saviour Himself setting down the perfect idea of that which we are to pray and wish for on earth, did not teach to pray or wish for more, than only, that here it might be with us, as with them it is in heaven<sup>3</sup>." We frequently read in the Bible of their appearing among men, but always in the fulfilment of some Divine command. And if we put out of view those accounts of angelic appearances which we meet with in the Old Testament, concerning many of which, indeed, it may be doubted whether they do not describe the manifestation of the Second Person of the Trinity, our blessed Lord; if we put these out of view, yet in the New Testament we have many accounts of their active obedience and zeal in the Divine service. These will readily occur to your minds. We may, however, particularly allude to that remarkable

<sup>3</sup> Eccl. Pol. book i. chap. iv.

assertion of our Lord to Peter, "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and He shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" These words at once convey the idea that there are vast armies of these noble beings, always capable of ready and resolute obedience to the Divine command; who will at once perform, without delay or hesitation, whatever the Divine Being may enjoin. And from the representation which St. John has given of the heavenly world, we may suppose that they are in a state of perpetual activity. They are said to serve God day and night in His temple. It is easy to conjecture that innumerable occasions may arise for this incessant and unwearied service. They were present, we know, at the creation of this world, at the Advent of our Lord, and they will be present in active service on the judgment-day. There are, too, doubtless, other worlds besides our own, and other races of intelligent creatures besides ourselves, and it may be easily imagined, that events of great importance are transpiring among them, which may require all the most watchful care and the most strenuous effort of these ministers of God. Indeed, the more we think upon the subject, the more conceivable it becomes, that, for all the hosts of heaven, numerous and powerful as they may be, there are occasions of active obedience continually furnished, so that, at any time, we may say they are doing, now doing, the commandments of the

Lord, hearkening in humble and zealous obedience to the voice of His word. And let us dwell for a moment on the wondrous thought which is thus unfolded to our minds. There is no region of creation, we may believe, in which these lofty beings are not passing to and fro, in strength and swiftness, for the fulfilment of some Divine command; each of them, with intentness and energy, doing what the Lord hath commanded him to do, zealously serving, to the utmost of his exalted powers, the great interests of holiness and truth. And so, wherever our eye moves along the vast and apparently vacant tracts of space by which we are surrounded; when we take account of the enormous intervals which separate world from world, and think of the mighty vastness through which our earth is floating, like an islet on a sea which positively hath no shore; we are looking, recollect, on no naked and unpeopled void; it is no solitude which we behold; for nigh, and around us, and afar off, these mighty beings are present in the sedulous fulfilment of their commissions. They may be here, in this very place, passing amidst us now, in the discharge of some high command, as they are present doubtless, too, in distant worlds, which are remote alike from our vision and our thought.

But it is not to stimulate or delight the fancy that we have dwelt at such length upon this great theme. We know full well that we shall have

accomplished nothing, unless we can make it subservient to some practical end; and that your hearing and my preaching will both have been in vain, emphatically in vain, unless our meditations on angelic natures and employments shall furnish us with motives to piety, shall enable us to make progress in that holiness and obedience which God requires. If this be not effected, it would have been well nigh as profitable if you had this morning been engaged in listening to the fictions of a poet's dream. We ask, then, what is taught us by the facts which the Church this day brings before our minds? The facts are plainly and concisely these; that there are beings in creation who, in all respects, are far nobler than ourselves, and that these beings continually find their happiness and honour in doing the Creator's will, in performing with all the energy of their lofty natures, without hesitation and without reserve, whatever He enjoins. They excel in strength, and yet are always doing His commands, hearkening with reverent attention to the voice of His word. And may we derive no lesson and no motive from these facts? Is there no force in this thought which they so naturally suggest?—If an angel, with his extensive knowledge and clear perceptions, knowing and seeing what he does, thinks it wise and right always and instantly to obey God, then can it be wise and right that I should venture on disobedience to the Divine will, or even hesitate at

prompt compliance with its injunctions? Can it be safe for me to attempt that which an angel would not dare to do? and may I with confidence violate that law, the minutest command of which he would shudder to transgress?—My brethren, this thought is naturally and obviously suggested by the subject we have been considering. And, let me say, it suggests more than this; for all these angels always keep the law, which, as matter of fact, we have broken and do continually break. And can it be wise that we should be unconcerned about our past transgressions of a will which they have always earnestly and anxiously obeyed? We are thus led to address those among you who have not repented of their sins, and who have not accepted the terms of pardon which have been offered to them by God. To such we say, The law you have violated without remorse, the Law-giver you have treated with disdain, these, creatures far more excellent than you, have always obeyed with reverence, and so they are free from all the penalties of transgression. It constitutes their highest happiness to know that they are free. Then, surely, it were well that you should secure like freedom for yourselves. And you may secure this; you may stand this day as spotless in the sight of God, as any angel who is moving in celestial purity through the courts of heaven: for “the blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin.” And if you make a personal application of that

blood to your own souls ; if there be on your part an earnest and simple faith in the atonement of our blessed Lord, then, in the language of Scripture, “ your transgressions will be forgiven, and your sins covered,” and you will stand spotless, yes, spotless as an angel in the presence of the Lord. He will give you grace, too, and strength to obey His will in future ; not indeed to perform the tasks which are committed to the angelic hosts, but to perform duties, nevertheless, to the fulfilment of which He assigns as high a worth as He does to the loftiest achievements of which the seraphim may make their boast. So, when hereafter, according to the promise of our Lord, you are made equal to the angels, when you mingle in their ranks, and join with them in their employments, you will have entered into scenes and society with the spirit of which you have already sympathized ; you will, in truth, be only taking a higher share of the very labours in which already you have borne a part. And if, when they witnessed your first emotions of repentance, there was joy in the presence of those holy beings, then, surely, when you meet them in the perfection of your redeemed and glorified existence, their joy will be louder and longer still. We may well believe that if there is gladness in their breasts, when they behold a sinner first turn from the error of his ways, then, much more, when they see that sinner enter into heaven, from henceforth free like themselves from sin, there will be

deeper gladness yet, so that perhaps the most glorious hallelujahs are echoed through the courts of paradise when a man, like one of us, is welcomed at its shining gates as he enters on his share of its occupations and its bliss.

We may naturally feel and express exultation when we think of the prospects of those who have sought and obtained the pardon of their sins through Jesus Christ, and who have been enabled, by the influence of the Holy Spirit, to render an acceptable obedience to God. But if we are conscious of exultation when we think of these, then it must be with deep sadness that we meditate on the future lot of those who will go forward to meet their Judge with sins unpardoned, duties unperformed, privileges unimproved; in a word, with absolutely no preparation for an interview they cannot avoid. We will, however, say nothing now of that great occasion. Indeed, with many men it seems quite useless to speak of future terrors. It is strange, but not less true, that to the majority of the disobedient and impenitent, the throne of judgment, the opened books, the scene of punishment, have no influence and no power. And so, for the present, we will pass these by, and leave them for your individual meditations. But there is one thought suggested by the subject of our discourse, which we should wish to urge on those whose sad case we are considering. We ask them to reflect seriously for a moment, on the sad spec-

tacle they must present to these holy beings as they move to and fro on their great commissions. Just imagine an angel pausing for a while in his course, to inspect the condition and to watch the proceedings of a hardened, an impenitent, an unbelieving man. If this holy being ever wept, surely he would shed tears of bitter sorrow as he reflected on the sad spectacle he would behold. That creature, he would say, might become glorious and happy as myself. What mad infatuation can possess him then, that he should waste in this manner his endowments, and despise in this manner his opportunities, and thus degrade and defile his immortal soul? He is refusing the pardon which is offered in his hearing, and prefers instead to continue unforgiven. He is turning from the crown of glory which is put forward for his acceptance, and prefers instead to possess and sport with the toys of the earth. O foolish, infatuated creature, will you never recognise your true happiness, and accept the mercy and goodness which is following you with offers in every step you take? Yes, and if he were not an holy angel, he might then turn away with contempt for the sinfulness and degradation on which he had been looking, and instead of the pity and wonder which, as an angel, he would feel, he might imprecate Divine vengeance on a being by whom God was so completely forgotten or despised.

My brethren, I turn with reluctance from this sub-



ject, for it suggests much more of practical instruction. But time forbids me to enlarge. Let me just say, however, in conclusion, that perhaps it is not so much, as with profit it might be, the habit of Christians to meditate on the information which is furnished to us of the inhabitants of the unseen world. Besides the direct lessons which it supplies, there is surely an influence, highly favourable to holiness, and elevation, and devotedness of spirit, to be gathered from a contemplation of the piety of the angelic hosts. It is said of Richard Hooker, that just before his death he was found in deep meditation, and not much disposed for speech, which gave a friend occasion to inquire what was the subject of his thoughts. He said, that "he was meditating on the number and nature of angels, and their blessed obedience and order, without which peace could not be in heaven; and, oh! that it might be so on earth." Soon after saying this he died<sup>4</sup>. Surely thoughts which occupied the mind of such a man, at such a time, may always profitably occupy our minds; but especially on a day which the Church has set apart for such reflections.

<sup>4</sup> Izaak Walton's Life of Richard Hooker.

## APPENDIX.

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### NOTE A. Page 19.

THE Gospel and Epistles of St. John, are indicative throughout of much gentleness and simplicity in the spirit of the writer ; and the traditions of the Church respecting him, as is well known, agree accurately with these indications. We can just imagine that the man who has so touchingly described to us the raising of Lazarus, and who penned the affectionate passages which are so numerous in the three Epistles, would demean himself, as Jerome has told us the Apostle did, when, in his old age, he was carried into the assembly of the Christians. But in the book of Revelation we seem to meet with the characteristics of quite a different spirit. We might naturally suppose the author of that book to have been a man of ardent or even of enthusiastic temperament, endowed with much vigour and fervour of imagination, conversant with imagery of pomp and grandeur, and not unconscious sometimes of wildness and vindictiveness of feeling. If, in the absence of information on the subject, we had made any conjecture respecting its author, we should certainly have never thought of attributing it to the Apostle whom Jesus loved. And accordingly, many modern critics have

attempted to prove that St. John the Evangelist did not write the book of Revelation, but that it is the work of another John, surnamed the Presbyter, who was contemporary with him. The testimony of Dionysius of Alexandria, preserved by Eusebius (Hist. Eccl. vii. 25), is the only ancient testimony which is explicitly given in favour of this opinion. This writer, however, without adducing any authority, announces *his own* conclusion merely, after considering the obvious dissimilarity between the style of the Apocalypse and that of the Gospel and Epistles. The uniform *authoritative* testimony of antiquity, it may be asserted, is, that John the Apostle wrote the book of Revelation. Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria, and Origen, expressly affirm this; nor has any satisfactory evidence ever been adduced in favour of the contrary opinion. We are therefore bound, in regard to this subject, to acquiesce in the commonly received belief; and if so, the proof mentioned in the paragraph to which this note belongs, may be concisely stated thus.—We have before us three works, which, with sufficient reason, we believe to be the productions of one man. In the first two of these works we find clear indications of the personal character of the writer, and history gives us an account respecting him, which is in strict accordance with these indications. When we have read the Gospel and Epistles, whether we admit their Divine authority or not, in either case, *we know the man who wrote them*. But this same man also wrote the book of Revelation: then he must have been, we are sure, at the time of penning it, under the influence of some power external to himself. Another step, and we have reached the conclusion that St. John was “in the Spirit” when he wrote down his wonderful disclosures. In this proof we have assumed nothing which an unbeliever may not be forced to

admit, and therefore we are entitled to call it a separate and satisfactory proof of the Divine inspiration of the Apostle.

NOTE B. Page 31.

“ Nothing which we at present see would lead us to the thought of a solitary inactive state hereafter, but, if we judge at all from the analogy of nature, we must suppose, *according to the Scripture account of it*, that it will be a community. And there is no shadow of anything unreasonable in conceiving, though there be no analogy for it, that this community will be, as the Scripture represents it, under the more immediate, or if such an expression may be used, under the more sensible government of God. Nor is our ignorance what will be the employments of this happy community, &c.”—Butler’s Analogy, part i. chap. v.

“ There is no life, nor animation, nor play of affection, nor energy of action, in that shadowy paradise which hath possessed the imagination of the religious. . . . They shun activity, and shut up all in rest and contemplation; they wrap up all ages, yea, all eternity, in the meditation of one single thought, the thought of our redemption; whereupon I ask them, what meaneth the emblem of a city, which, all the world over, denotes activity, and society, and social engagements? . . . To God and Christ, surely the whole time, and soul, and occupations of the people of heaven, will be devoted. But how? not in one act of harping or singing of praise, not in one act of contemplating and resting, but in the active promotion of every good faculty which inhereth into the renewed soul of man, in the propagation of happiness far and near, in the pursuit of knowledge and of every enjoyment.”—Irving’s Orations, p. 418.

## NOTE C. Page 45.

The Rev. Jeremiah Jones, in the second volume of his work on the Canon, has given at full length the two spurious gospels in which the traditions referred to, relating to our Lord's infancy and youth, are published. These gospels are called respectively, the Gospel of the Infancy, and the Gospel of Thomas the Israelite. Some of the narratives they contain, which, for the most part, are exceedingly trifling and absurd, are said to have been current in the second century, but there is reason to believe that the greater part were not invented and published till a much later period.

## NOTE D. Page 60.

The following calculations by the late Sir W. Herschel, are given by Dr. Pye Smith, in his work on Geology. "The light by which Sirius is seen by us, moving at its known velocity of 192,000 miles in a second, is at least six years and four months in its passage to our system. By applying the equation which Sir William had established, he brought out that the brilliant nebulæ which only his telescope could reach, are distant from our system by a number of miles, to express which in common arithmetical numeration, requires twenty figures, of which the first eight are 11,765,475, the 11 denoting trillions, and the other number billions, the remaining part of the sum being much more than 948 thousand millions. This almost unmanageable number is expressed by Sir William Herschel thus: 'above  $11\frac{1}{4}$  millions of millions of millions of miles.'" "Yet," continues Dr. Smith, "when we have strained our minds to contemplate, in the extremely feeble manner to which our faculties are competent, this overwhelming distance, we have no reason to think that we

have touched the circumference of the astral sphere, or that we have advanced beyond the threshold of God's creation." The author, then, might truly say, that our arithmetic cannot express the number which must multiply the wonders existent on the earth, if we would give a just statement of the operations of Almighty power.

NOTE E. Page 64.

There are some important remarks in the third book of Dr. Whewell's *Bridgewater Treatise*, in explanation of the fact, that many men of high mathematical and scientific reputations have rested in the laws of nature "as ultimate and all-sufficient principles, without seeing in them any evidence of their having been *selected* and *ordained*, and thus without ascending from the contemplation of the universe to the thought of an Intelligent Ruler." This enormous error, as we have ventured to designate it, is not chargeable, he has shown, on the great discoverers of Nature's laws,—they, with scarcely an exception, have been as much distinguished by their devoutness as by their sagacity,—but on those who, assuming the truth of these laws, have been employed in developing the consequences to which they lead. Such persons, says Dr. Whewell, "by assuming perpetually the existing laws as the basis of their reasoning, without question or doubt, and by employing such language that these laws can be expressed in the simplest and briefest form, are led to think and believe as if these laws were necessarily and inevitably what they are." Under the influence of this notion, such an one may come "to substitute for the Deity certain axioms and first principles as the cause of all. And the follower of Newton may run into the error, with which he is sometimes charged, of thrusting some mechanic cause in the place of

God, if he do not raise his views, as his master did, to some higher cause, to some source of all forces, laws, and principles." But "the philosophers who have looked upwards as well as downwards, to the unknown as well as to the known, to ulterior as well as proximate principles," have never in this manner put the statutes of the universe in the place of its Sovereign, but "have perpetually extended their views forward, beyond mere material laws and causes, to a First Cause of the moral and material world, to which each advance in philosophy might bring them nearer, though its highest attributes must probably ever remain indefinitely beyond their reach." And of Newton especially we are told, that "it never appeared to him, as it may have appeared to some mathematicians who have employed themselves on his discoveries, that the general law was an ultimate and sufficient principle; that the point to which he had hung his chain of deduction was the highest point in the universe."

NOTE F. Page 85.

Satisfactory proof of the assertion, that one of the four Gospels (St. Matthew's) was in existence and circulation within thirty years after the occurrence of the events which it professes to record, may be found in the third volume of Mr. Jones's work on the Canon. Three of the early writers, he shows, have given distinct testimony to that effect; and it is confirmed by the subscriptions of several ancient manuscripts, *found in different places*, as also by a sentence at the end of the old Arabic version of St. Matthew's Gospel.

NOTE G. Page 115.

"It is constantly happening, that things hardest to be understood are receiving a complete elucidation; and every

great obscurity elucidated is an objection removed ; and every objection removed affords one of the best, because most unsuspecting, testimonies to the truth and authority of any writing. But instead of reasoning upon the justice of this remark, let us at once endeavour to illustrate and apply it, by selecting from the history of theological science one or two of the most obvious examples by which it has been sometimes so irresistibly confirmed.

“ It is well known, then, that it had long been a matter of wonder to find St. Paul, when brought before the Jewish Sanhedrim, expressing himself as if ignorant that Ananias, their president, was the high-priest, though at the very moment Ananias was sitting before him in his judicial capacity, and perhaps also in his pontifical robes. ‘ I wist not, brethren, that he was the high-priest,’ said the Apostle when rebuked for censuring him ; and the saying undoubtedly seemed strange, until the researches and ingenuity of Michaelis drew forth facts from the history of the times which removed the wonder at once. He has shown that Ananias had indeed been for a very short time in possession of the power, but was still without any just claim to the authority of the pontifical office ; and that, consequently, the ignorance which St. Paul expressed, and which, at first sight, appears merely assumed as an excuse for his own conduct, was either, as it easily might be under such circumstances, real, or else was intended as a reproof to the usurpation of his judge.

“ Again, it had often been alleged as an objection to the historical accuracy of the New Testament, that it gave the title of Proconsul to the Governor of Cyprus, when, in strict propriety, he could only be styled Prætor of the province. So strongly did this apparent inaccuracy weigh with Beza, that he absolutely attempted to remove it by his mode of translating the text ; and our own authorized



version seems, in like manner, to have evaded the difficulty by adopting the neutral term 'Deputy,' instead of the correct title of Proconsul. A medal, however, has since been discovered, on which the very same title is assigned about the same period to the governor of the same province, and thus the difficulty has vanished for ever. But it has not vanished without leaving a strong evidence of truth behind. For discoveries like these are of incalculable importance to the believer in the evil hour of temptation. When, as in the former instance, a passage which had long puzzled our understanding, receives at last an unexpected and satisfactory interpretation, assurance revives with doubly energy; or when, as in the latter of the two cases, the learning or ingenuity of some laborious antiquary or divine has met with an inscription on a marble or a coin which had hitherto been overlooked or unknown, and by applying it to some difficulty under which we were labouring, gives a clear and happy solution of the whole, a new and unwonted vigour is immediately communicated to our faith; for an apparent objection to the credibility of the Bible has thus been turned into a real evidence of its truth, and the consequence which naturally follows is that of giving an additional degree of confidence to our reliance upon a religion whose very weakness has been proved to be strength."—*Benson's Hulsean Lectures for 1822.*

THE END.

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